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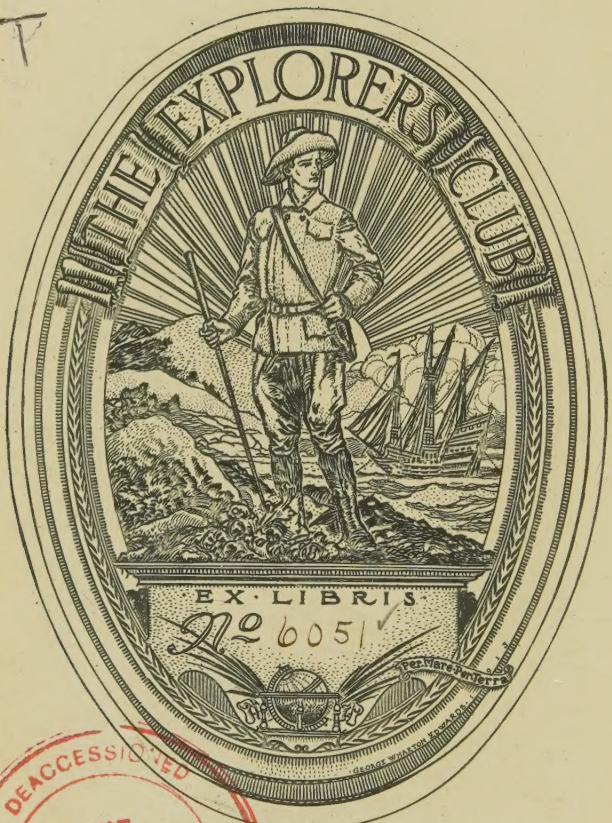

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THROUGH PERSIA

THE PASS OF 'GOD IS GREAT,' LOOKING DOWN ON SHIRAZ.

[*See page* 165.

THROUGH PERSIA

FROM THE GULF TO THE CASPIAN

BY

F. B. BRADLEY-BIRT

I.C.S., F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF 'CHOTA NAGPORE' 'THE STORY OF AN INDIAN UPLAND' AND 'THE ROMANCE OF AN EASTERN CAPITAL'

WITH 31 ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP

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NOTE

The following pages are simply the record of a journey home from India by one of the many overland routes. They attempt only to give the impressions of an Eastern country, as yet practically untouched by European civilisation, formed by one who has spent ten years in the East among a people who for a hundred and fifty years have been subject to Western influences. It is a new, and perhaps a salutary, experience for an Indian official to come into contact with an Oriental people who owe no allegiance to the West. The recent popularity of Persian travel among Europeans may also lend added interest to the book. If it is of help to those who intend to undertake the journey, and succeeds in interesting those who can never hope to wander so far afield, it will have amply fulfilled its object.

To General Houtum Schindler and to Mr. G. Grahame, H.B.M.'s Consul-General at Ispahan, who have so readily placed their intimate knowledge of

all things Persian at my disposal, and who have both revised the proofs, these pages owe a debt of gratitude which this brief acknowledgment but inadequately repays.

United Service Club, Calcutta
July 1909.

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THROUGH PERSIA

CHAPTER I

UP THE PERSIAN GULF

Surely nowhere in the world is there an arm of the sea so fraught with historic memories as that which guards the approach to Persia on the south. Quitting India at Karachi, one sails straight out into another world, a world of Oriental despotism and old romance. In the land that is left behind, even over its greatest treasures and most historic memories, there has fallen something of the desecrating atmosphere of the West. The hurried footsteps of the tourist breaks in upon the majestic silence even of the Taj and robs the Residency and the Ridge of half their awe and inspiration. But this land, towards which one has set one's face, still lies deep buried in a world of its own. At its gates the nations of the West have long since beaten, but none has gained admittance. For four centuries their merchant ships have ridden the waters of the Gulf, but the foreigner himself has gained permanent possession of no foot of Persian soil, and not being of the ruling race has exercised the smallest influence

on the changeless course of Persian life and custom. Here is the last great stronghold of the East across which the invading and compelling forces of the West have not yet swept. All that survive of the wonders of a past age still stand as the destroying hand of man or as the passing centuries have left them, unmarred by restoration and ungarnished for the tourist's eye.

Even at the outset as one crosses the Arabian Sea historic memories crowd thick upon one. This way from the Indus, at whose mouth lies Karachi, sailed Nearchus, admiral of the great Alexander, in the fourth century before Christ, leaving so careful a record of his voyage that its course along the northern shores can still be traced to-day. From the opposite end of the Gulf, from Busrah in Arabia, twelve centuries later came Sinbad the Sailor, of wide renown, on his seven voyages of far-famed adventure to furnish nursery tales for all time to come. Early in the sixteenth century there suddenly appeared upon the scene the high-pooped vessels of the Portuguese, first of European nations here as elsewhere in the rush for empire in the new worlds east and west. For well nigh a century they rode the seas, their possession, undisputed from the West, contested only by the Turk and Arab seamen of the coasts, who proved themselves no unworthy rivals in naval warfare even for the greatest maritime power of the age. Then at the beginning of the seventeenth century there followed in their wake the English and the Dutch, eager to rob the earliest pioneers of their hard-won laurels and wrest from them the empire of the seas. From time to time the French appeared

like meteors amidst the clash of warring elements, making spasmodic efforts to share the spoil and plunder of this new world of wealth, the fame of which, magnified a hundredfold in Oriental flower of speech, had spread far and wide over the West.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this coveted arm of the sea was the constant scene of strife from end to end. With varying fortunes, the Portuguese, clinging with dogged tenacity to the first foothold they had won, held their own for a hundred and fifty years. Then, lacking the true commercial instinct and the inborn genius for colonisation, and drunk with military glory, religious fanaticism, and wild adventure, they finally disappeared from the scene where they had played so great a part, leaving behind them only innumerable landmarks and the great traditions of their passing. The opportunity they had missed another great-little nation, just then drawing to the height of its naval glory, was not slow to seize, and for a time the Dutchmen swept the seas. Then, as their predecessors had lost their hold through lack of the commercial instinct, the Dutch lost theirs through sheer sordid greed of gain and monopoly, leaving to the English, who combined political strength with the keenest aptitude for trade, that supremacy in the Gulf towards which they had been so long, slowly but surely, drawing near.

The first port of call is the most picturesque spot along all these coasts. Barren, rocky, inhospitable, the Arabian coast line looms into view, rising abruptly out of the sea. Its huge frowning masses of range on range of hills, destitute of all

sign of life or vegetation, stretch gloomy and forbidding as far as the eye can reach. In this long, dead wall of coast there is something strikingly impressive. Its silence is like the silence that hides a mystery, strong in the strength that silence gives. And behind it lies Arabia, that land of legend and romance whose secrets these towering walls of cliff that stand between it and the sea guard well with all the tenacity and suspicion of the East. Hidden in a deep recess along the rocky coast, it is not until the steamer is well abreast that Muscat first comes in sight. It is like some scene in a magic grotto, suddenly disclosed to view. To the left tower huge rock islands thrown hundreds of feet high straight out of the sea, only a narrow gap between them and the land. Behind, and away to the right, jutting out into the sea, rise the same bare dust-brown rocks, sheltering in the hollow thus formed a bay in miniature, half a mile wide and twice as deep. The town itself, a line of flat square white walls and brown roofs, built one against another and covering every inch of space available, stands on a narrow strip of ground, facing seawards, at the furthest end of the bay. Straight behind it towers the huge mass of rocks, gloomy and menacing, looking as if it would crush it into the sea. Truly, if ever a thing stood between the Devil and the deep sea, it is Muscat. On either side ruined battlements and turrets, built by the Portuguese in the heyday of their power, crown the heights; while dotted here and there against the wall of rock perch tiny watch-towers, their dead brown walls scarce visible against the self-same coloured cliffs. It is all like a picture of romance,

a robber stronghold of some pirate horde, the whole set in the exquisite blue of an Eastern sky and faced by the sparkling shimmer of the waters in the bay.

On the extreme left, facing an opening in the rocks to gain every available breath of breeze, stands the British Consulate, a large double-storied building over which flies the British flag—that most welcome of sights in a strange land. Close beside it is the residence of the English doctor, of the Indian Medical Service; while further along the front, the only other building of note, stands the Sultan's palace, surmounted by the flag that once floated over a far wider and more independent kingdom than it does to-day. Behind, out of sight from the bay, live the French and American Consuls, the only other nationalities represented at Muscat. In the town itself there is little else of interest save the motley crowd, representative of many nationalities, that throngs its narrow streets and alleys. One's first brief glimpse shows only its picturesqueness. Doubtless a closer acquaintance might lead one to endorse the famous saying of the English ship's captain concerning its inhabitants, penned a hundred years ago: 'As to manners,' he wrote, 'they have none; and their customs are beastly.' Like so many other things in the East, its chief charm lies in the first impression. A longer stay in its midst, fascinating with the opportunity for the study of much strange and new humanity, yet discloses all the pettiness and sordidness of the daily round, and makes life well nigh unendurable with the appalling heat. For in this respect Muscat bears the most unenviable reputation along all these coasts. One

traveller, writing more than four centuries and a half ago, with true Oriental magnificence of metaphor, described the heat as 'so intense that it burned the marrow in the bones, the sword in its scabbard melted like wax, and the gems which adorned the handle of the dagger were reduced to coal,' language, however, which John Struys the Dutchman in his 'Voyages' bids fair to outrival when he speaks of Muscat as 'so incredible hot and scorching that strangers are as if they were in boiling cauldrons or in sweating tubs.' The rainfall is given officially as three inches in the year, but, as one who knows Muscat well remarked, it must have been a particularly wet year in which so heavy a rainfall was recorded. It requires no great effort of the imagination, as one looks at the towering rocks that shut in the town below, to gauge something of the heat they radiate and to understand the discomforts of the various writers who have made such frantic efforts adequately to describe their undesirable acquaintance with it.

But even though April is well advanced it is a glorious day, clear and cool, with a fresh breeze blowing, when the steamer casts anchor off Muscat. The bay itself is alive with craft. The Arabs of the coast are born seamen, as much at home on sea as they are on land. In their light swift sailing boats they hurry out to meet the ship to buy and sell, or carry passengers and merchandise ashore. At anchor ride the 'Hyacinth' and the 'Highflier,' the former the flagship of the Commodore, with the Admiral, on a visit to the Arabian ports, on board. Close by, on the point of starting lies another of the

British India steamships and the trim, spruce yacht of the Sultan, the 'Nur-el-Bahr,' the Light of the Sea. On the steep, bare sides of the huge rock islands to the left stand out in enormous white letters the names of many of the ships which from time to time have anchored in the bay. H.M.S. 'Sphinx,' H.M.S. 'Lapwing,' H.M.S. 'Redbreast,' are only some of the many that catch the eye. The sailors, not allowed to land in Muscat itself, lest English high spirits clash with Arab dignity, have broken the monotony of board-ship life by adventurous climbing over these rock islands, leaving behind them thus the peaceful record of their stay in the bay.

It is but fitting that a place so romantically situated should boast a stirring and romantic past. Even as one rides at anchor in the bay, in all the quietness and peace of modern days, it is not difficult to conjure up before the imagination some of the many stirring scenes that those frowning rocks have witnessed. The capital of Oman, Muscat had been ruled for nine hundred years, before the coming of the Portuguese, by its own independent Imams, or spiritual overlords, whose authority was derived, not from divine right, but from popular choice. For all these centuries, save for the few enlightening glimpses that travellers have left behind, the passing of the years in this republic of the Arabian coasts, with all their incidents of war and jealousy and intrigue, are a closed book. Then suddenly within the bay appeared the magnificent ships of the Portuguese, bent on conquest, and ushering in a new era in naval warfare and political outlook for the city which had

so long lived its own life, absorbed in its own local interests. Here was a new enemy to be encountered, an enemy so strong and skilled in warfare that the poor defences which it had deemed impregnable fell before it like chaff before the wind. It was in 1506 that these unknown vessels from an unknown land first sailed into the bay, bearing on board the redoubtable Alphonso d'Albuquerque, eager for fresh adventure to add fresh laurels to his name. It was small wonder, however, that the Arabs, though they looked upon these new ships of another and more powerful build than theirs with awe, yet met their challenge without fear, trusting in the natural defences of their harbour. To-day the men of war that ride peacefully at anchor in the bay could make short work of them, but in those days of Arab warfare the defenders of Muscat might well have felt confident in their impregnability. One can picture the scene of confusion and excitement that the sudden appearance of this new foe must have created in Muscat. But there was no question of submission, and they flung defiance at the Portuguese. They were soon to learn, however, that as yet they were no match for these new antagonists from the West. Storming their defences, Albuquerque landed his men and sacked the town, putting it to the flames as a sign of his anger at their presumptuous resistance.

Then before the eyes of the astonished Arabs many strange things came to pass. The Portuguese, in all the enthusiasm of the early days of their naval supremacy, began in Muscat that extraordinary combination of colonisation, domination, and religious persecution which constitutes the unbroken record of

their conquests in the new worlds beyond the seas. How great was their regard for their religion even in a strange land is still evidenced by the remains of their cathedral in Muscat to-day. To the Arabs this, their first contact with the West, must have brought strange and conflicting thoughts. But though they suffered much at the hands of the Portuguese, they learned from them lessons in seamanship and warfare of which in late years they were to make full use. The stormy period in the history of Muscat had begun, and the battle was as ever to the strongest. The Portuguese themselves were soon to find that their possession was not destined to go undisturbed. First, in 1546, appeared the Turks; and though they were beaten off, they brought home to the Portuguese the need of further defences, and Dom Joao de Lisboa, the Viceroy, began the fortress known as the Merani, which still survives, crowning the western summit of the rock above the town. But before it could be completed another Turkish fleet appeared in the bay, and this time succeeded in wresting it for the moment from its latest conquerors. In 1580 the town again fell a prey to invaders, an Arab fleet sailing round the coast from Aden, and once more sacking the much-suffering city. But the Portuguese, though worsted for a time, clung with grim determination to this their first conquest for nearly a hundred and fifty years. It was not until their strange brief period of ascendency drew to its close, and succour failed them from their own home in the West, that the Arabs finally ousted them from Muscat in the middle of the seventeenth century.

Trained by their long contest with the Portuguese, the Arabs were ripe to become a power at sea. Pushing their conquests far along the Persian Gulf, they ventured on the other side still further afield and founded a new empire at Zanzibar. Succumbing for a brief space to the triumphant march of the Napoleon of Persia, Nadir Shah, they once more held their own amidst the turmoil that followed at his death. Out of the strife rises the redoubtable figure of Ahmed-bin-Said, the camel driver, who proved the man of the moment and a born leader of his fellows. Driving the Persians out of Muscat, he was elected Imam by his countrymen, and founded the dynasty whose flag still floats over Muscat to-day.

It was in the time of his son and successor, Seyid Sultan, that the East India Company concluded its first two treaties with Muscat in 1798 and 1800. The first was designed to frustrate the supposed intention of Napoleon to make Oman a basis of attack upon India; the latter stipulated for the residence of 'an English gentleman of respectability' at Muscat in order that, in the quaint language of the treaty, 'the friendship of the two States may remain unshook to the end of time, and until the sun and moon have finished their revolving career.' It is satisfactory to be able to record that the friendship thus grandiloquently inaugurated has existed unbroken ever since.

One of the chief objects of the East India Company in its relations with Muscat during the last century was the suppression of the slave trade, which had so long flourished along these coasts, and

which even to-day is not wholly extinguished. For this purpose the Indian Government still pays a considerable subsidy to the Sultan, the origin of which is somewhat curious. During his long reign of forty-two years Seyid Said, the grandson of the camel driver, had made Zanzibar his headquarters; but aware that his possessions, so scattered geographically, must inevitably fall apart at his death, he left Muscat to his elder and Zanzibar to his younger son. The latter, however, was by far the richer inheritance, and disputes arising, Lord Canning, as Viceroy of India, was called upon to arbitrate. Confirming Seyid Said's disposition of his property, he at the same time awarded to the Sultan of Muscat an annual subsidy of forty thousand crowns, to be paid by his brother of Zanzibar, to equalise more nearly the inheritance. But it was not long before, local troubles arising in Muscat and occupying its full attention, the Sultan of Zanzibar took the opportunity of declining to pay the subsidy. Thereupon the British Government stepped in, and, in order to secure the complete abolition of the slave trade between Muscat and the African coasts, made itself responsible for the annual subsidy which it has ever since paid. Seyid Turki, the Sultan of the time, so well performed his part of the agreement, and stood so high in the favour of the British Government, that the G.C.S.I. was conferred upon him in 1886. Two years later he died and was succeeded by his son Seyid Feysul, the present Sultan, whose son and heir was one of the most prominent figures among the magnificent company of native princes at the Delhi Durbar in 1902.

Bidding farewell to Muscat and steaming out of the bay, one passes the neighbouring town and port of Matra, on the left. Nine miles from the capital, it is situated in another fissure in the rocks; but though considerably larger in extent it is far less picturesque. So cut off by land is Muscat even from this near neighbour, and so difficult the short journey across the rocks, that the trade between the two is carried on almost entirely by sea. Fruits and fish are almost the only articles of commerce. It is difficult to imagine from the barrenness of the rocks on every side whence the supply of fruit comes; but within a short distance of Muscat, in the interior, is a fertile strip of land where dates, limes, melons, and other tropical fruits flourish, and where, too, lie the wells from which the town derives its supply of fresh water.

On the opposite coast, some two hundred miles further up the Gulf of Oman, lies Jask, a port possessing both historic and present interest. Here was set up the first English factory on Persian soil. The great Shah Abbas, in an interview which he granted to Mr. Connock, the East India Company's agent in 1617, promised, 'as he called for wine and in a large bowl drank his Majesty's health upon his knee,' that he would grant the Company 'Jask or any other port we should require, and every freedom in every respect as his honour might grant.' It did not long, however, remain the headquarters of an English factory, and the chief interest of Jask to-day is as a connecting station on the Indo-European telegraph line. Here the wires, having travelled beneath the sea from Bushire, nearly five hundred

miles away, reappear again and complete the distance of some six hundred and eighty-four miles overland to Karachi, where they finally end the wonderful journey that brings two continents within close touch.

A hundred miles further on a bold rocky promontory juts out northward into the sea, as if to bar the entrance to the Gulf. Behind it tower tier on tier of dark basaltic rocks, rising 6,750 feet sheer out of the sea, the waves leaping and roaring in their caves and crevices and deep indented fissures. Cape Musandim, termed poetically by Moore 'Selama's Sainted Cape,' bears also the name of 'Rock of Salvation' or of 'Welcome.' Forbidding and inhospitable as it appears to the stranger, it may well be that to the Arab adventurer, who has left the waters of the Gulf for travel further afield, this rugged promontory is a welcome sight as a sign of his journey's approaching end. At the furthest point of the long line of rocks, thrown off from them as if in a last endeavour to bar the passage of the Gulf, stands a huge rock island between it and the mainland, a dank, cavernous opening shut in by frowning cliffs that tower eight hundred feet high on either hand.

Here, as one rounds Cape Musandim, one is abreast of one of the most historic places in all the Gulf. On an island, four miles from the northern shore, once rose the famous city of Ormuz, whose wealth and splendour amazed every traveller from the West. Yet the soil and situation were surely the most unpropitious that nature could afford. The whole island, twelve miles in circuit, was without

a single well or spring of fresh water, and all provisions had to be transported from the mainland. 'It is the dryest island in the world,' says Master Ralph Fitch, the English merchant, who visited it towards the end of the sixteenth century, 'for there is nothing growing in it but only salt.' Only Oriental patience and magnificence could have converted so unpromising a site into so great and opulent a city. From the sea it must have looked in its heyday like some mirage of the East. 'The citie of Ormuz was of great bignesse,' wrote Thomas Wilson, Chyrurgion, in 1622, 'the Houses all built of stone, and seemed a most famous thing to looke upon from the ships, with steeples and toures. They had fair and large churches in it, strong and stately buildings; the Castle of Ormuz was the fairest, largest, and strongest that I ever saw.' One can picture the landing there, five years later, of Sir Dodmore Cotton, the Ambassador of Charles the First, which Sir Thomas Herbert describes in his own inimitable way: 'Wrapped in smoak and flame,' writes the worthy knight, 'we landed safely, though Neptune made us first to dance upon his liquid billows, and with his salt breath seasoned the epicinia. The Cannon also from the Castle and Cittadel pointed out their choler, ten times roaring out their wrathful clamours, to our delight, but terrour of the Pagans, who, of all noise, most hate artificial thunder.'

On the mainland, twelve miles away, lay Gombrun, the port for the overland trade between Ormuz and the interior, captured by the Portuguese after they had seized Ormuz itself. It was taken from them in turn by the English, whom Shah Abbas had called in

to his assistance. The English, not scrupling to join forces with an Asiatic against a European nation in this bitter rivalry with the Portuguese, renamed the place Bunder Abbas, after the Persian monarch, and maintained a factory there for well nigh a hundred and fifty years. This was then the chief port in the Gulf, and through it lay the main route across Persia through Lar and Shiraz to Ispahan. But with the opening out of other routes the glory quickly departed from Bunder Abbas, and only the ruins of the Portuguese forts and their immense tombs and reservoirs remain as mute witnesses of what once was.

Close by is Kishm Island, again a world of romance lying buried in its past. But there is time for only one brief glimpse. It was taken from the Portuguese, at the same time as Ormuz, by the combined British and Persian forces. Of the two Englishmen killed one was William Baffin, the discoverer who has left his name for all time in Baffin's Bay. His death on Kishm Island is thus quaintly described by Thomas Wilson, Chyrurgion of the Fleet: 'Master Baffin went on shore with his geometricall instruments for the taking the height and distance of a Castle wall for the better levelling of his Peece,' he writes, 'but as he was about the same he received a small shot from the Castle into his belly, therewith he gave three leapes, by report, and died immediately.' For the greater part of last century Kishm remained a British naval station garrisoned by British and Indian troops, being finally abandoned only in 1879.

Strange and mysterious tales cling about these ancient cities of the Gulf, tales of wild adventure

and impossible romance. The flotsam and jetsam of humanity of every nation under heaven seem to have been cast upon the shores of this screened and secreted corner of the sea. When all was change and chance, every nation against every nation, and every man for his own hand, nothing was impossible for the bold adventurer. With everything to gain and nothing to lose, and ready to take what came in his way untroubled by stirrings of conscience, with pluck and brains, here a man found a new world untrammelled by the restrictions and conventions of the old. It was small wonder that men fleeing from the law which they had outraged in their own land should fling off all restraint here, where order there was none and the Ten Commandments lacked the ordinance of man to put them into force. Foremost among them the Portuguese seamen, strange mixture of unbridled licence and religious fanaticism, heroic courage and magnificent seamanship, led the way, the story of their doings in the Gulf furnishing material for whole volumes of romance. In their wake, eager for the spoil, came representatives from well nigh every nation in the West, leaving behind them astounding records of what man has done and can do in the Gulf. But among them all it is perhaps an Englishman who holds the palm for variety of adventure and successful enterprise. No career could well be more astonishing than that of Thomas Horton, the Englishman, the erstwhile tailor's apprentice in a north-country manufacturing town. Versatile and unprincipled, he seems to have played every part in life in turn until he found his métier on Kishm Island, that lies just within sight

away to the right as the ship steams on towards Bushire. From a soldier in the Swedish army to a merchant in the French service; from leader of a company of banditti in the Crimea to official Customs Inspector on the shores of the Caspian; from roving Mussulman Haji to respectable English merchant at Busrah and agent of the East India Company, he seems to have passed with equal facility and success, leaving behind him in every avocation a memory of crime and fierce, indomitable energy unchecked by any fear of God or man. To such an adventurous spirit the Persian Gulf in the early years of the nineteenth century held out golden opportunities. Quitting his rôle of English merchant and agent of the Company as easily as he had quitted many another, he launched out into new fields of adventure as Commander-in-Chief of the naval forces of the Arab Shekh of Kishm, whom he soon found it to his interest to depose and murder, with consummate audacity marrying his widow and getting himself elected Shekh in his stead. So Thomas Horton, no longer the English tradesman's apprentice, but a strict and orthodox Mussulman Chief, ruled over Kishm Island. And with so much justice and equity did he rule that he gained the respect of all men, his name being spoken with awe and reverence along all the northern coasts of the Gulf. Yet perhaps the most astonishing part of his whole life story is the fact that he continued to rule over Kishm Island for more than a quarter of a century, finally dying in the odour of sanctity as a true believer in the faith of the Prophet, and in full possession of his temporal

kingdom. There is one last glimpse of him. True to his Mussulman adoption, he is said never again to have spoken his native tongue; but one tale is told of him which would lead one to believe that he still carried some memory of the homeland even through all his eventful career. An English ship was wrecked off the coast of Kishm, and the news was brought to the erstwhile Thomas Horton. Their coming must have stirred strange chords in the old adventurer's heart, and though he refused to see them he sent every possible assistance to the ship-wrecked crew; and, learning that it numbered one hundred and twenty officers and men, despatched an equal number of female slaves on board as a crowning act of hospitality.

Many another story of even more recent date is told along the seaboard of the Gulf. Hidden away among the strange mixture of diverse races that gather in those seaport towns, there lives to-day many an adventurer whose life story, were it but known in its entirety, would read scarce less romantically than that of Thomas Horton's Shekh of Kishm. A youth of twenty, the son of a German sailor and an Arab woman, black as a Nubian, yet speaking English with scarce the trace of an accent, and half a dozen other languages with equal facility, far travelled well nigh all over the world, yet his means of subsistence a mystery over which even the gossips in the bazaars shake their heads; an old man, impossible now to distinguish from an Asiatic, whose costume, speech, and manner of life he has so long made his own, yet an Englishman in the beginning, the very mention of whose name still awakes suspicion in

the native mind; and yet another, of unknown race and parentage, though exercising an unexplained, mysterious influence in the Arab quarters, whose past and present no man knows, not even the omnipotent secret service of the Foreign Office—these are but three of the many strange, mysterious figures that still haunt the littoral of the Persian Gulf.

So at last, steeped in the wonder and mystery of this historic sea, one draws near to the journey's end. The sky is clear with more than the clearness of an Indian blue, the sea an ever-changing mass of colour in every exquisite shade of sapphire and green, yet hiding behind its almost untroubled surface enormous rocks and treacherous shoals that make the Gulf one of the most difficult of navigable highways in the world.

For miles away to the right the Persian coast has been in sight, a stern, bare mass of tier on tier of cliffs that look to fall at last straight down into the sea with never an inch of shore. Bare and brown and red in the brilliant noonday glare, they soften to every delicate tint of mauve and grey, and yellow and pink and blue, in the morning and evening sun. With the breeze still fresh and cool, it is as far removed as it well could be from the terrible heat that other travellers have recorded, and as one approaches Bushire one looks back gratefully across the waters of the Persian Gulf, knowing that one has seen it in the fairest garb it ever wears.

CHAPTER II

IN BUSHIRE

If ever city could be called a city of the sea, it is Bushire. So low it lies it looks far off like some raft city set free upon the waters. Inch by inch as one draws near, it rises into view, vague, unreal, and shimmering in the sunlight, caught up between sky and sea. There is seemingly never a foot of ground to spare. The waves lap round its walls as if they clamoured at its gates, grudging it the few feet of earth that raise it up beyond their reach. All white and yellow and brown, it is like an amethyst set in a silver sea. Though square, and flat, and unrelieved by a touch of green, its clear cut outlines rise unmarred by chimneys, and its neutral tints undimmed by smoke.

Built at the extreme end of a peninsula, eleven miles long by four miles broad, Bushire has a beauty all its own, unlike that of any other city in the East. The romantic setting of Muscat has been extolled by every traveller who has passed this way, but few have written of the charm and picturesqueness of this, the first city of the Gulf. It has figured only as a dull, brown city on a wide, bare stretch of sand where the heat by day and by night equals all that travellers of old have written of Kishm and Ormuz.

A BIT OF THE BAZAAR, BUSHIRE.

A STREET SCENE, BUSHIRE.

All these it may be; yet viewed from the sea as one approaches it is only its picturesqueness that meets the eye. Thrown out into the sea, its houses lie close-packed one against the other, an irregular jumble of roofs, but all straight, flat, and the colour of desert sand. There are no trees in the city itself, nowhere a patch of green. Countless windows, mere bare slits, close-barred and shuttered, look out from the walls and behind the narrow railed-in verandahs, like sightless eyes that see nothing and give no index of the soul behind. For this is the first dominant impression of Bushire—even before one sets foot on Persian soil—that one has run one's head against a dead wall. Its utter secretiveness baffles at the outset, and throws one back upon oneself. It seems to cry aloud that it will tell you nothing; that all that matters is hidden and close-guarded; that you are a stranger and can never enter into its inmost heart and thoughts. It is all shut in, silent and reserved, like a Persian woman with her veil drawn close around her.

First, as the boat draws near to anchor we pass the British Residency at Sabzabad, six miles from Bushire itself. Then come the fine large buildings of the Indo-European Telegraph Department at Reshire, where once in days gone by stood the old Portuguese fort, only the bare outlines of which now survive. Nearer the city lie the German and Russian Consulates, the latter a handsome building flanked by a tower at either end, over each of which a flag floats gaily in the breeze. Further on, in the city itself, opposite which the steamer comes to anchor, is the British Consulate General facing the sea, its

flagstaff towering high above the flat, low roofs of the native quarter which surrounds it.

So shallow is the immediate approach that it is impossible for ships of any considerable size to come within two miles of the quay. There is nothing that can be dignified by the name of harbour. Though the chief town in Southern Persia on the Gulf coast, Bushire has none of the natural facilities of a port, the only anchorage being out in the open sea, subject to all the inconveniences of transhipment and exposed to the full violence of the storms that at certain seasons of the year sweep the coasts. There is little sign at first sight in the roadstead of the very large trade that now passes this way. A few small fishing boats dotted here and there between the anchorage and the shore, and the small forest of masts on the further side of the town, where lies the Custom House, are all that is to be seen in the way of merchant shipping. At anchor close by ride the Royal Indian Marine gunboat 'Lawrence' and the Persian gunboat the 'Persepolis,' with the revenue cutter 'Muzaffer,' which together constitute all that modern Persia can boast in the way of a navy.

For in spite of her splendid stretch of coast, commanding all the northern shore of the Gulf, Persia has shown the smallest aptitude for nautical affairs. Throughout the whole course of her history she has made scarcely an attempt to turn to her own advantage the wonderful opportunities that the Gulf and the Caspian offer. Persians of every class and in every age seem to have been born with an unconquerable repugnance to the sea. So far from

becoming seamen, they have exhibited a horror even of trusting themselves upon the waves as voyagers. The poet Hafiz, having travelled all the way from Shiraz to Ormuz, intending to set out thence by sea to visit India, was so overcome with sea-sickness immediately on embarking that his heart failed him, and, being set ashore again at his urgent entreaty, nothing would induce him thereafter to embark again. Abdur Rezak, a century later, when sent as Ambassador of Timur's grandson to an Indian potentate, had experiences no less unfortunate, of which he has left on record a most unconsciously amusing account. 'As soon as I caught the smell of the vessel,' he writes, 'and all the terrors of the sea presented themselves before me, I fell into so deep a swoon that for three days respiration alone indicated that life remained within me.' Later on, after he had actually suffered much from the buffeting of the waves, he adds, 'With tears in my eyes I gave myself up for lost. Through the effects of the stupor and of the profound sadness to which I became a prey, I remained, like the sea, with my lips dry and my eyes moist. Even now my heart is troubled and agitated as it were a fish taken out of fresh water.'

These are but the experiences of two sea-sick travellers, yet they are typical of Persian distaste for all that appertains to the sea. From the earliest days the Persians voluntarily shut themselves off from the rich harvest of gain and fame which awaited them on these southern coasts, leaving the navigation of the Gulf entirely in the hands of the Arabs, who did not fail to make full use of so splendid a field of

conquest and adventure. It was not until the days of Nadir Shah, in the middle of the eighteenth century, that any attempt was made to add naval to military glory. That far-seeing monarch, with his schemes of world-wide conquest, was quick to perceive the great strategical advantage that the Caspian and the Gulf afforded, and, with all the energy and enthusiasm that had carried him so far on the road to empire, he set himself to provide his country with a fleet. He would have a navy to transport his armies and a mercantile fleet to bring wealth and prosperity to his coasts. But it was a herculean task. On the Caspian he enlisted the help of two famous Englishmen, John Elton and Jonas Hanway, and there his efforts met with some promise of success; but on the Gulf the difficulties with which he had to contend were well nigh insurmountable. He had no workmen and no timber, and when the ships should be built no seamen of his own race wherewith to man them. Yet, nothing daunted, he ordered timber to be felled and transported from Mazanderan, eight hundred miles away, despatching with it workmen from that province to teach the southerners to build ships such as they themselves had just constructed on the shores of the Caspian. Arab or Indian seamen perforce must man his ships if those of his own race failed. It was a tremendous undertaking, typical of the keen, far-seeing mind that conceived it, and doubtless only the hand of the assassin prevented a Persian fleet from riding the waters of the Gulf and carrying yet further the triumphs of Persia and of Nadir Shah. Only once since until recent times has any further attempt

been made to found a navy. Some twenty-five years after Nadir Shah's death, Kerim Khan Zend, the great Viceroy of Shiraz, actually succeeded in launching a fleet of thirty-two vessels, which his brother, Sadek Khan, used to some effect in his expedition against the Turks at Busrah. It is the sole naval exploit in Persian annals.

It was not until a century later that Persia again became the proud possessor of a navy, this time consisting of a single ship. It all reminds one irresistibly of comic opera. There being no marine department, there was at first some indecision as to which department should be entrusted with the important duty of reviving the Persian fleet. Finally it was given to the Department of Instruction, Telegraphs, and Mines, the son of the Minister in charge, Mukhber-ed-Dowleh, being despatched to Europe to purchase a man-of-war ready made, with officers and crew complete. Things made in Germany had already gained a reputation in Persia twenty-five years ago, and it was in Germany that the 'Persepolis,' a screw steamship of some hundred tons, with a full complement of officers and men, was acquired. She also carried on board in sections a small river steamer of some thirty horse-power to be fitted together on arrival in Persian waters. Long, however, before the 'Persepolis' appeared in the Gulf the newly aroused zeal for a Persian fleet had subsided at Teheran—possibly a bill for 30,000*l.* received from Germany may have helped to lessen the enthusiasm—and the subsequent experiences of the Persian Government with its one man-of-war have certainly not been such as to

encourage it to indulge in further maritime enterprise. The four Krupp guns which man the 'Persepolis' have never to this day been used save to fire salutes, while the vessel herself has been continually out of repair and a constant source of trouble and expense. One by one the German officers and men who manned her have returned home, the only exception being the Commander-in-Chief himself, a German officer, who, after relinquishing his high-sounding title, has taken up his residence in Shiraz. Flying the Persian flag of green and white, the 'Persepolis' now rides permanently at anchor outside Bushire, trim and neat and capable to outward seeming, yet in reality disabled and a derelict, typical of the outward show and inward hollowness of the country of which she alone constitutes the navy.

But although the steamer has meanwhile come to anchor in the roadstead the landing is not yet. Quarantine regulations are unexpectedly strictly observed at Bushire. In this respect at least the Persian Government, backed by the British officials in the Gulf, has shown unwonted energy and firmness, as many who have thought on one pretext or another to evade these same regulations will testify. Plague is a word that strikes terror into the heart of every Asiatic, and even the easy-going Persian has been aroused to purchase for himself immunity by enforcing a law that shall not be broken. Formerly ten days' quarantine was required from Karachi, the last infected port, but early in 1907 this was reduced by half. The fast mail steamer, however, which calls only at Muscat, arrives at Bushire in less than four days.

There is thus something like a day and a half to be put in on Quarantine Island before being allowed to land in Bushire. Travelling by the slow boat which calls at many of the other ports *en route* takes considerably longer, and thus, besides affording fascinating glimpses of Persian life along the shore of the Gulf, also obviates the necessity of any acquaintance with Quarantine Island.

No welcome on foreign soil could well be more lacking in hospitality than this. Bushire, the silent, mysterious city, still for a few hours longer guards herself against intrusion before she reluctantly admits the stranger within her gates. Quarantine Island is indeed the Purgatory. One can only hope while suffering its inconveniences that Persia will prove the Paradise beyond. Nothing indeed could be more bare and desolate and uninviting than this wind-swept stretch of sand. It lies two miles away from Bushire, and almost as far from the steamships' anchorage out at sea. Seen from a distance it lies so low above sea level that it is scarce distinguishable as land. A long, low bungalow, a group of huts, and a single palm tree, forlorn and desolate, as if it had sprung up there by chance and mourned its fate, seem but to accentuate the loneliness and desolation. To reach it at all is no easy task. It is the most inconvenient of landings. Transferred with some difficulty in the open sea from the steamer to a small sailing boat or buggalow together with one's belongings, one makes a rough, uncomfortable approach to Quarantine Island. The sea is distinctly choppy and the traveller on deck watches his belongings thrown from the steamer into the smaller boat with some trepidation. The roll of

bedding narrowly escapes immersion as the buggalow dances on the waves to the great amusement of the crew and of the little group of passengers who have already taken their seats, squatting on their own strange articles of baggage as if with the grim determination that nothing but death should part them from them. A scramble down the side of the steamer and a final jump at the right moment as the buggalow rises up to meet one on the crest of the wave and the short but adventurous journey has begun.

There are only seven passengers in all landing at Bushire, a strange assortment of diverse nationalities, each one a study in himself. A Kabuli, huge with greasy black locks and wide baggy trousers, none too clean, dominates the group as he lounges insolently against a huge bale of goods, evidently his stock in trade, his turquoise-ringed hand grasping a showy ebony stick inlaid with mother of pearl. Near him, in sharp contrast, sits a small wizened little man in neat black coat and small round cap, the exact counterpart of a thousand other office clerks who daily throng the streets of Bombay. Seated on his modest bundle of belongings somewhat apart, as it were, half apologetically, as if he knew that he was entering a land where his nation, though tolerated in these modern days, still needed to walk with circumspection, sits an Armenian, eager to be back again among his own people in his beloved Julfa. The fourth is unmistakably a Parsi merchant, rich and prosperous, a descendant of the fire-worshippers of old who, driven out of Persia, set themselves to win fame and wealth in Western India, and to take their

place in the foremost rank of modern enterprise. One wonders as the boat dances over the waves whether his thoughts lie wholly in the trade and commerce of the twentieth century, or whether the mysterious influence of place has already caught him in its grip and carried him back to the early days of the beginning of his race. Fat and well liking, a Hindu Marwari sits beside him, a jealous eye upon his bales of Kashmir shawls and Indian silks, over-anxious lest they suffer damage from the rough transhipment they have just met with and are soon to undergo again. Perched somewhat insecurely on a huge coil of rope stand two wicker cages in which three feathered fowls of wondrous hue crouch motionless, obviously bored with the long journey from Java, which their owner, a yellow, unwholesome-looking individual of unknown nationality, informs one they have done. Last, but by no means least, is a venerable descendant of the Prophet, whose green puggaree sets him apart as one who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and who is now on his way across Persia to the shrine of Fatima at Kum and the still more sacred shrine of Imam Reza at Meshed further north.

Scarcely less interesting than the passengers themselves are the sailors who manage the lumbering sailing boat with such wonderful agility and skill. They are all Arabs, black and smiling with flashing white teeth. It is typical of the Persian's dislike for the sea that he lets the Arab ply the ferry boat at this his chief port, while there is not a single Persian of any kind on board among passengers or crew. Clad in loose fitting butcher-blue coats and white

embroidered caps, the Arab sailors man the boat and rig the sails with all a born seaman's assurance and precision. They are a cheery crew, hopeful doubtless of much *backsheesh* from the unaccustomed European voyager. From the other passengers they know full well they will get the usual douceur and no more, but the white man furnishes unlimited possibilities which they evidently discuss with much speculation and pleased anticipation in an unknown tongue.

So gently does the soft sandy beach of Quarantine Island slope out to sea that it is necessary to tranship once more from the buggalow to a smaller boat while still some distance out. The ferry boat is so small that it only just contains oneself and one's belongings and the two sailors who man it. The rest of the passengers have perforce to wait. At imminent risk of being dropped into the sea one's luggage is again transferred, but one is finally obliged philosophically to watch it fall a prey to the waves as they dash over the side of the smaller boat on the way to the shore. Had one but known one might have regarded it more philosophically still as but the first of many adventures which were destined to befall that same luggage before one finally blushed to own it on the platform at Charing Cross. Quickly, however, the third and last stage of the journey is reached. It is impossible for even this smallest of rowing boats to approach within fifty yards of the beach, and one has to submit to be carried ashore clinging in an altogether uncertain and undignified manner round the necks of the two sturdy Arab sailors, who alone are incorrigibly cheerful, still hopeful of much *backsheesh*.

The staff of Quarantine Island, waiting to receive the traveller on the beach, is not imposing. It consists only of a Khansamah, a black-bearded Mussulman of the type made familiar in many an Indian Dâk bungalow, and one assistant. They look singularly forlorn as they lead the way to the bungalow, built literally on the sand, for there is nothing else on the island whereon to build it. It is a rough, hastily finished building, yet containing all that is actually required for the short, compulsory stay. A five and a half days' residence in it, however, such as the last occupants of it had to endure, having come in the fast boat from Karachi in the days before the quarantine period had been reduced, and trusting to influence in high quarters to obtain exemption from the general rule, must have proved wearisome in the extreme. For the island of Abbasabad, to give it its more picturesque name, is nothing but a long stretch of low-lying sandy plain cut off from the mainland by an arm of the sea. Beyond the bungalow and group of huts for the Asiatic travellers, there is no other building on it save the isolated cinerarium wherein to destroy the clothes of the plague stricken, if such ever find their way so near the gates of Persia. Of vegetation there is only the desolate palm tree, the poor attempts of the Khansamah to initiate a garden, and the feeble blades of grass, few and far between, from which half a dozen scraggy-looking sheep and a few stray donkeys vainly try to wrest a meal.

There was one pleasant surprise, however, that Quarantine Island held in store. From many quarters there had come oft-repeated warnings to expect the

very worst that one could imagine in the way of heat in the Gulf, and assuredly the long low stretch of sand, bare of an inch of shade, looked capable of fulfilling these gloomy predictions to the full. 'The Persian Gulf in April,' friends already gasping in the heat of Calcutta and Bombay had exclaimed with uplifted hands, solemnly shaking their heads and regarding one as if for the last time. Death from apoplexy was only one of the many evils foretold. Yet so far wrong were these dismal forebodings that one actually shivered in the Persian Gulf, and sat huddled in every coat one possessed in that wind-swept bungalow on Quarantine Island. All day and all night the wind howled and whistled in one continuous gust, alternately ebbing and flowing like a tide, but never ceasing, sweeping in through the ill-fitting doors and windows, and driving in the fine white sand in clouds. It was bitterly cold. Even in the middle of the day by no stretch of imagination could it have been called warm. A deck chair not yet discarded proved a boon indeed. Huddled in two topcoats one endeavoured to keep warm as night fell and the sun that had tempered the cold west wind by day sank out of sight beyond the hills that far off flank the stretch of bare brown sand.

It is welcome news soon after daybreak on the second morning that the official ferry boat which is to release one from Quarantine Island has set sail from Bushire. With one's belongings ready packed and eager to begone one awaits its coming on the beach. For the white man the doctor's examination is a mere formality; for the Asiatic it is a little less perfunctory. Soon, however, having undergone the

same form of transhipment as on arrival, one is aboard the ferry boat with sails full set for the city which has so long kept the stranger waiting at its gates. It is a glorious morning, cool and clear, the gently stirring waves alive with a myriad lights in the rising sun. Bushire, the silent, mysterious city, looms up out of the sea, more silent and more mysterious as one draws near. Even Quarantine Island itself seems touched with the joy of morning, its long expanse of sand glittering in the sun. Behind, the long range of the kotals rises up against the sky in one continuous sweep, like some rampart of the gods designed to defend what lies beyond from prying eyes. Away across the wide expanse of sand rises up, shrouded in the morning haze, elusive like a mirage, what seems to be a fortress with turrets and towers, a thing of neither earth, nor sky, nor sea. Ahead lies Bushire. Its huge block of houses jutting out into the sea, bare, brown and a jumble of roofs, seems to be set without foundations afloat upon the waters. There is not a touch of green to be seen, only wonderful browns and yellows and reds, set in a perfect frame of azure sky and lit by the radiant light of the morning sun. For a moment the strangeness and brilliancy of it all dazzle one. A feeling of unreality holds one spellbound. There is an atmosphere about it, puzzling and elusive, that at first defies expression. Then as one shades one's eyes, looking long and steadily at the city that every moment grows clearer into view, the reason of that feeling of strangeness and mystery is suddenly revealed. It is the silence and deadlike stillness that dominate the whole.

Nowhere is there a sign of human life. This might be some city of the dead from which those who peopled it had fled in terror from the foe or still more dreaded pestilence. Fresh from India, where every town is awake with the rising sun, the absolute stillness and desertion of Bushire strike one with full force. Here there is no busy home life in the verandahs and open courtyards, fully exposed to public view; no groups of naked, nut brown urchins playing with quaint Eastern solemnity and contentment in the dust and the sun; no groups of women on the housetops, gracefully tiring their hair or spreading their gorgeous saris in the breeze. Once more it is brought home to one with renewed insistence that this is Persia, the land of closed doors and high walls, where no woman goes unveiled or ventures out into the public gaze save enveloped in sombre black or blue, all her bright garments and attractiveness reserved for the privacy of her own home alone.

Even the Quay, on which stands the Customs House, wears the same air of silence and desertion. Although the sun is well up in the sky by the time the ferry boat draws alongside, there is none of the stir and bustle that might have been expected of the greatest port in Persia. Only half a dozen figures altogether are to be seen on the Quay, two of them huge, magnificent types of the Persian of the South lounging with all the indolent grace of the East against the pillars of the office verandah. Conversing with them is a yellow wizened little man in a more or less English uniform which looks strangely incongruous beside the loose, easy costume and peaked puggarees of his companions. But he proves all that can be

desired in the way of a Customs official as he detaches himself from the group and comes to meet the ferry boat. There is no officiousness, no undue prying. Armed with a passport obtained from the Government of India, which here at least in Persia meets with much respect, and a permit from Teheran to carry a revolver, there is no difficulty, and one is free forthwith to set out for the British Consulate, which stands facing the sea on the further side of the town.

A narrow path skirts the city, the only barrier between it and the sea, and as one follows it one gets one's first close glimpse of a Persian town. This may not be the real Persia that one will see later: long contact with India and the Indian people has done much to rob it of its distinctive characteristics, but there is still much that is altogether Persian. There is nothing in an Indian town that so ostentatiously proclaims itself closed and barred against the outside world as these Bushire houses. Not only are the women's apartments walled in and shuttered, the whole house itself is cut off from public view. The outside walls, straight and flat, unbroken by verandahs, with only narrow slits like loopholes for windows, disclose nothing of what lies behind, even the main entrance door opening on to a dead blank wall, effectually screening the courtyard within from the chance gaze of a passer-by. Within there is the open courtyard, stone-paved and cool, often with fountains playing and gay with flowers, astir with the daily round of domestic life. But from the stranger's eye these things are jealously hid. These high dead walls baffle one at the outset. They force on one an overpowering sense of helpless-

ness as if one were shut out and roughly cast aside. One feels already a sense of disappointment, aggrieved that one can know so little of the mind of a people who entrench themselves so resolutely within the sanctuaries of their own homes. Later on, when Persia and Persian ways have grown more familiar, one is forced reluctantly to acknowledge that the inner mind of the people is a closed book that no foreigner may read; but at the outset, with one's enthusiasm still fresh, as one treads the silent narrow streets of Bushire, one is still restless with the desire to know and understand.

The Consulate over which, on the highest point in Bushire, flies the British flag is no longer the actual residence of the Consul-General and Resident in the Gulf. It is altogether given over to officialdom. Here the Resident and his staff have their offices, and to this unpretentious mud-walled building, the many secrets that lie within guarded by smart Indian sepoys, all the important affairs of the Gulf find their way for final decision. To the Resident all the British representatives in the ports along the coast look for guidance and direction, while to the same individual, who, as Consul-General is directly under the Home Government, many of the British Consuls in Persia itself also owe allegiance. Bushire is the half-way house where English and Indian interests meet and fuse. On the one side the British representative is Resident in the Gulf, and is directly under the Indian Foreign Office; on the other hand he is Consul-General in Southern Persia, and, as such, directly subordinate to the Foreign Office, Downing Street. It seems at first sight an anomalous

position, as if it were calling on one official to serve two masters. Yet it apparently answers well. Even as far afield as Meshed the influence of the Consul-General at Bushire extends, the Consuls at both Meshed and Baghdad being nominated by the Government of India, but gazetted direct by the Foreign Office.

The Consulate General is a long rambling building, much in the usual Persian style. Round a large square courtyard in the centre lie the rooms, facing inwards, the upper story built, as it were, on the roof, with closed in verandahs or wide open spaces guarded only by low mud walls. It is a curious city on to which one looks from the roof. On three sides stretches a vast expanse of other flat roofs of every height and shape and size, each apparently so closely joined to its neighbour that one could almost imagine it possible to walk from one to the other over the top of the city. Yet even here, with the city spread out at one's feet, the first feeling of bafflement and mystery still holds. Still one sees nothing. The roofs are too close-packed, the courtyards too far below to disclose aught of the daily life that assuredly goes on busily within. The dark brown roofs are as barren of life as the sandy plain that lies away beyond. To-day, however, as one learns now in the Consulate, there is a special reason for this silence that envelops the city. It is the day of national mourning for the Prophet, the solemn commemoration of his death. From far off comes faintly the sound of long-drawn cries and weeping where the faithful, gathered together, beat their breasts, rousing themselves into a frenzy of grief and lamentation. This is one of the most important of all the long succession

of Persian festivals, and for to-day the common round of life is stayed, as one but rarely sees it stayed in the West, each man setting himself with amazing self-abandonment to play his part in the celebration of the great festival according to the immemorial custom of his religion and his race.

On the morrow Bushire is itself again. It is still a city of high walls and closed doors, but the death-like stillness that held it has gone. All the buying and selling and ceaseless activity of an Eastern bazaar has begun again. It is our first glimpse of a Persian bazaar, and particularly interesting by reason of its unexpected novelty. It is as different from its Indian counterpart as from the artificial gatherings that have adopted its name in the West. Unlike the Indian bazaar it is always enclosed. The stalls raised some three or four feet from the ground, and often rising upwards in tiers to display their wares, are solidly built of brick and mortar, a high vaulted roof spanning the narrow pathway that runs between them. Down this pathway saunters leisurely a motley crowd. There is no haste, no unseemly hurrying. The whole day is made to bargain in, and does not he who holds out longest, exhibiting the greater indifference, pay in the end the lesser price? So narrow is the way that one is constantly forced to edge close against the stalls to let pass a string of mules or some lordly Persian, astride a pony, who rides slowly through regardless of the press. The stalls are covered with wares, many and diverse, bearing often unmistakably the stamp of Birmingham or the still more insistent 'Made in Germany.' In a Persian bazaar men of a trade for the most part

congregate together, their stalls similarly temptingly arranged side by side. The sweet-meat sellers and the general provision merchants seem the most popular and their stalls are many. The bakers bake the long flat Persian bread, that looks much like a pancake, in full view, displaying it for sale on raised slabs in long straight strips that look as if they sold it by the yard. Sitting cross-legged behind their stalls, the shoemakers make the wonderful Persian shoes with compressed rag soles that are as firm as and far more durable than leather. The sweet-meat sellers prepare their sticky, unappetising-looking sweets at the back of the stalls surrounded by a crowd of flies. Here, in sharp contrast with Persian domestic life, the various occupations are carried on full in the public eye for all to see. In the tea shops, with their plain wooden benches round the walls, their steaming samovar and array of tiny glasses, from which the Persian drinks his tea piled high with much lump sugar, there is always certain to be a group of loungers. For the Persian at all times loves his glass of tea, which perforce must serve as stimulant in place of the strong liquors so strictly forbidden by the Mohamedan religion. It is all a fascinating scene of life and interest.

The one disappointment is the sombre garb of the Persians themselves. In spite of all that has been written, one still half expected something of colour and picturesqueness. Of colour there is almost none. The women creep furtively through the byways clad from head to foot in a long black shroud-like garment drawn closely round them, unrelieved save for a white patch of gauze across the

eyes, and disclosing nothing of the figure within, save the feet clad in ungainly bright yellow top-boots. It is the most unpicturesque, ungraceful costume that the most jealous of husbands could devise. No stranger may look upon the Persian woman and see the beauty that many a poem and romance would lead one to believe lies hid behind those close-drawn veils. Neither is the Persian himself given to fine raiment—at least in Bushire. Clad in a long close-fitting garment reaching to the knees, sombre black or of some neutral tint, trousers, pointed shoes, and puggaree or small round cap, he is anything but a picturesque figure. The peasant, of finer physique, unkempt, in blue smock, bronzed with labour in the field or with long journeys in the sun over the kotals to Shiraz, is of far more interesting appearance, less conventional and less reminiscent of the India one has left behind.

There is little else of special interest in Bushire. This chief port of Persia has few of the historic interests that so many other of the ports along the Gulf possess. Yet that it was a place of some size and importance far back in the history of the world is evident. An enormous number of stone and earthenware jars and vases containing human remains which are supposed to be those of Zoroastrians have been found in the immediate vicinity, while Bushire itself is probably the Messambria where, according to Arrian, the fleet of Nearchus cast anchor after its long journey up the Gulf from the Indus. Many centuries later the ubiquitous Portuguese adventurers arrived and built a fort and trading station at Bushire. But their career

here was even more meteoric than elsewhere along the Gulf, and, driven out early in the seventeenth century, they left no memory of their passing save a heap of ruins and a well-earned reputation for magnificent seamanship and reckless daring.

Not until a century and a half ago can the history of modern Bushire be said to have begun. So far, at its best, it had been nothing but a small fishing village, and it remained for the genius of Nadir Shah to recognise its immense importance as a naval base on the southern coast. Death cut short the great man's plans, and the fleet he had designed never rode the waters of the Gulf; but his recognition of Bushire as the chief port of Southern Persia raised it to a position of importance which it has never since lost. A few years later, consequent on the decline of Bunder Abbas, the East India Company moved its factory to the new centre farther west, where it met with a generous welcome from Kerim Khan Zend, the enlightened Viceroy of Shiraz. The growth of the factory was slow, but it was steady and continuous, and in this small way began the dominating influence of the Indian Government in the Persian Gulf which has ever since found its centre in Bushire.

Even in its modern days the history of the city has been altogether uneventful. Only once since the Portuguese finally abandoned it has it heard the sound of a gun fired in anger. It was during the brief and inglorious campaign of the Persian-British war of 1856–7. Landing not far from Bushire towards the end of the year, the British force under Sir James Outram attacked the old Portuguese fort of

Reshire which the Persians had hastily rebuilt and fortified. It provided but poor resistance against British troops, and with it, an easy prey, fell Bushire, a city altogether unversed in the arts of war.

Close by the ruins of the old fort stand the modern buildings of the Indo-European Telegraph Department, that magnificent example of European advance and enterprise. The first overland telegraph line was laid at Bushire in 1864, but it was not until six years later that the present through communication between Karachi and London *via* Teheran and Bushire was opened—a distance of nearly six thousand miles by land and over thirteen hundred knots by sea. The line from Karachi to Teheran is under the Indo-European Telegraph Department, the remainder from Teheran to London being under the Indo-European Telegraph Company. How great a feat the conception and execution of this wonderful wire line was, it is only later that one fully realises, as one sees the telegraph posts dotted against the sky line, surmounting some precipitous kotal or running mile on mile straight as a die across some desert stretch of sand. It was an extraordinary revolution for this exclusive and conservative Eastern country to be suddenly brought into close touch with all the chief centres of the world. So backward was Persia, and so sudden her advance in this direction, that she got the telegraph line before she had developed even the most primitive of postal services. It is difficult to realise that even as late as fifty years ago it took three months to get a reply from India home, whereas now it takes less than three hours. At

Bushire, the largest station on the Indo-Persian line, the wires after the long journey of some 4,700 miles enter the sea, only reappearing again at Jask, 499 miles away, whence they once more pursue their way overland 684 miles to Karachi.

Bushire is almost innocent of anything in the nature of a road. Within the city proper there is nothing but the narrow alleys between the houses, with high walls on either side; while out beyond the roads are little more than mere cart tracks worn across the desert sand. The British Residency lies some six miles away from the town, a long sandy drive across the plain. There is nothing of interest by the way save the deep covered pits in which the Persians grow their vines and the numerous donkeys laden with great bulging skins full of fresh water. For drinking water is scarce in Bushire, and must needs be imported and paid for in hard cash. So little desirable is the best water that can be obtained, that a supply is regularly brought in casks by steamer from Karachi for the Residency, but the ordinary Bushiri has fain to be content with the purest local water that can be got from the wells near Reshire, which he buys for something like twopence per donkey load.

Such is Bushire to-day. Its past unheroic, with but few touches of romance, its present is eminently peaceful and prosperous. What its future will be it is difficult to foretell. Things are still in a state of uncertainty in Southern Persia, and many great schemes lie as yet in the making. The question, of such immense importance to Bushire, as to which route should be chosen as the great highway of

Southern Persia still awaits decision. A land without railways, such as this, is capable of infinite expansion and the building of a line to bring it into closer touch with East and West is but a question of time. Whichever route is finally decided upon, it cannot fail to have the very greatest influence on Bushire. The hope of actual communication by rail with the interior seems well nigh altogether cut off by the immense natural barriers that lie across the northern road. Between Bushire and Shiraz, with its four parallel ranges of hills and its ascents that reach to a height of 7,500 feet, even the genius of modern engineering must surely fail to design a line of rail. The two most possible routes for the building of a railway in Southern Persia, from Baghdad to Shiraz, and from Shiraz to Bunder Abbas, leave Bushire severely alone. Should they ever come to pass it seems inevitable that they would tend to the revival of Bunder Abbas at the expense of Bushire. The chief claim of the latter to importance is that at present it is the southern terminus of the principal, and in spite of its difficulties, the most accessible route into the interior of Persia. If the railway ever runs from Shiraz to Bunder Abbas it would seem that Bushire must lose the very *raison d'être* of its existence and of its one hundred and fifty years' supremacy in the Gulf. But as yet these things are only possibilities of the far-off future, and the city of the sea goes on her prosperous way with typical Persian indifference, unmindful of the things that future years may bring.

CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNING OF THE ROAD

Interesting as Bushire is, the call of the road that lies beyond soon grows insistent. It is a road of nearly a thousand miles in length, unbroken by a single line of rail from end to end, and innocent of modern conveniences of travel. To dignify it by the name of a road at all is for the most part to pay it a compliment that it ill deserves. For miles it runs over the kotals, a winding staircase, rocky and precipitous. Beyond, it wanders on a seemingly endless track, scarce visible between the 'desert and the sown.'

For such a journey there are many final preparations to be made at Bushire. It is a bewildering task for the voyager, ignorant of the exigencies of Persian travel, to collect his outfit before starting. Even those who have done the journey differ astonishingly as to what it is necessary to provide for the way. Against the man who is content to rough it and hurry on by post wagon the roughest of all forms of Persian travel, and who consequently burdens himself with the scantiest of kit, there is the man with time and money at his disposal who takes things comfortably and travels by caravan with full camp outfit. He who has travelled by the one knows, as a rule, little or nothing of the other. Even when two

have travelled by the same route in the same way opinions differ very largely as to where necessities end and luxuries begin. In India, save among the very few, complete ignorance reigns as to Persian life, while in England ideas are, if possible, vaguer still. It is thus not easy for the intending traveller to decide exactly what equipment to provide. Fortunately much camping in India had taught one both how many things it is possible to do without, and how many things it is wise never to discard. So well did experience enable me to judge that there was nothing I regretted not having taken, while only two things remained at the end of the voyage for which I had found no use—a revolver and two packets of Keating's powder. The former I never really needed: the only occasion on which I was sorely tempted to produce it I felt that it would undoubtedly have precipitated matters and made things look more ugly than they were. The latter I did not use, not because they were not wanted, but because the very first night on the road showed me all too clearly the utter futility of two small packets amongst so many!

One of the most essential things to remember in equipping oneself for the road is that all the luggage has to be carried on pack-mules for at least the first portion of the journey over the kotals. It is therefore necessary to choose only such portmanteaus or holdalls as will fit conveniently into the rough Persian saddle-bags that lie across the mules' backs. Two Gladstone bags and two holdalls should easily contain all one's personal belongings, while a small box for all necessary cooking utensils will balance a well-stocked tiffin and tea basket on the other side. Two

mules will comfortably carry all this, provided the Gladstone bags and the holdalls are of moderate size. On the top of one of the loads will perch himself one's personal servant, cross-legged, in an apparently most uncomfortable position, in which, however, he is quite content to remain all day.

This same servant in my case, Jaffir Khan by name, was procured in Bushire, and proved all that could be desired in the way of valet, cook, and courier. An Indian servant, even one accustomed to camp life, would have a rough time of it across Persia; while his ignorance of the country, and particularly of the language, would seriously hamper one. It is far wiser to trust to finding an experienced man of the road in Bushire. Jaffir Khan, though he had previously been no further than a four days' march over the kotals, adapted himself with true Persian *sangfroid* to the exigencies of the road. After some exhausting climb up the steep sides of a kotal he was ready with a refreshing cup of tea almost before one had got one's breath again, while at the end of a long day's march he would lay before one in an incredibly short space of time a dinner that would not have discredited far finer opportunities. He was a man of infinite resource. If the packs fell off the mules he was as energetic and skilful as the charvadar in fixing them on again. If the carriage broke down, as it frequently did, he was never at a loss for the little bit of string that enabled it to pursue its unsteady way again, while in the way of bargaining and staving off exactions he was quite invaluable. That he himself should demand something extortionate in the way of wages

was perhaps to be expected, but having secured that, he certainly fully earned it by preventing others from fleecing one likewise.

In selecting one's outfit it is well to remember that both extreme heat and extreme cold have to be encountered *en route*. The first day's journey from Bushire across the dead level stretch of sand at the foot of the kotals is as hot a day's march as could be found anywhere, whereas, further on, the cold at Dehbid, the highest inhabited place in Persia, though delightfully clear and crisp, is intense. Two overcoats, a couple of rugs, and a *resai* proved an altogether ineffectual protection against it during a long night's drive at 7000 feet. A mosquito net or preferably a sand-fly net is a necessity, for both mosquitoes and sand-flies flourish; while a hand filter, light and portable, is most desirable, for the clear cool streams that look so tempting, reminding one of home, are by no means safe. The pistol it is as well to carry. The knowledge that it is there counts for something, and though to produce it would undoubtedly add to one's difficulties in nine cases out of ten, it inspires confidence to know that it is there in case of need. Only in case of actual personal attack could one afford to use it, and with an eye to this undesirable eventuality it is as well to be able to have it handy. As to stores, if one is travelling fast, the fewer the better. All the actual necessities of life can be procured *en route*. The ubiquitous *murghi*, here as in India, is always at hand for the European to fall back upon in case of need, while a Persian *kabob*, or *pillau*, made only as a Persian can make them, are dishes than which one could wish none better.

Before hiring the mules it is necessary to visit the Bank of Persia, that most useful institution to the traveller in the Shah's dominions. Practically unprotected, in a land where the majesty of the law is shadowy in the extreme, it is eminently desirable to travel with as little as possible in the way of hard cash. Provided with a number of bills of exchange, the Bank of Persia, with its branches in all the large towns, enables one to procure just sufficient cash at each centre to carry one on to the next. Persian money is extremely inconvenient to carry. It either consists of very dirty notes, which it is often difficult to cash in the interior, or of silver coins which are heavy and cumbersome. The kran and half-kran are the coins most in use, roughly corresponding in value to the four and two anna bits in India. The toman is equal to ten krans, thus being equal to two rupees eight annas. It is a little astonishing, as one provides oneself with a large supply of kran and half-kran pieces, to find that in spite of the poverty of the country the latter coin, worth about twopence, is the smallest coin one will use throughout the journey. Even that is looked at much askance from the European traveller, and only taken with open disgust in return for the smallest service. The variations of the Persian bank rate must surely remain a mystery to any but a bank manager. All I was able to discover about it was that it steadily fell as I advanced across Persia. Whereas I received fifty-one krans for every fifteen rupees or English sovereign at Bushire, I got only forty-seven by the time I reached Teheran, whereas not long before I was told the rate had stood as high as sixty krans.

In the courtyard of the British Consulate one hires the mules for the journey, and with due formality their owner signs and seals the contract. A fine upstanding Persian of the south, the contractor runs no risks, and only contracts to get us to Shiraz in nine days. A third of the price is to be paid on the spot, the remainder to be handed to the charvadar at the journey's end. As to the price there is much haggling. The Englishman is a stranger in the land and therefore fair game. Moreover the last travellers to pass this way were a European Prince and Princess, and the contractor usually employed by the Consulate apparently took the opportunity to raise the rates. Now he stands out firmly against any attempt to lower them again. At first he demands seventeen tomans for each mule for the journey to Shiraz, but fortunately another outside contractor appears upon the scene. Finally the latter agrees to accept thirteen tomans each for his mules and the bargain is struck. Two mules and a *yabu* (pony) are to be on the quay at 5 A.M. on the following morning, ready for the start.

Through the kindness of the Resident in lending his launch, the first stage of the journey to Shiraz is considerably shortened. A fifteen-mile journey across the sea to Shif, which is speedily accomplished by launch, avoids a long and tedious day's march round on shore. Soon after daybreak, steam is up and all one's belongings are on board. Early as it is a small crowd has gathered on the Quay to watch the start. The mules are to be towed in a buggalow behind the launch, and the crowd watches with absorbed interest as the charvadar struggles manfully

to get the first of them on board. They seem determined to maintain the obstinate reputation of their race, but it is something of a leap from the Quay into the boat, and finally a rope has to be procured which, drawn close round the hind legs of the mules, fairly forces them to jump at the last moment to save themselves from falling headlong. The *yabu* at first sight is something of a shock. Small and thin, he looks anything but a promising steed for a mountainous journey of over a hundred and fifty miles. But he, like many other things in Persia, is later to prove other than he seems and to give magnificent testimony of his spirit and endurance. At last they are all on board and the word is given for the start only to find that the charvadar has disappeared. Inquiries only elicit the vague replies, given with true Persian indifference, that he may perhaps have gone to take a last farewell of his family or to bring food for the journey. There is nothing to be done but to await his pleasure and to try and absorb meanwhile something of the happy-go-lucky Persian spirit, which meets whatever comes with a shrug of resignation, and a murmured 'Inshallah' (if God wills).

Right on the Quay, beside which the launch waits, is the palace of the Governor of Bushire, a large rambling building over which floats the Persian flag. In front lounge a few Persian soldiers, presumably on duty, but disreputably dressed, with uniforms ragged and dirty and boots ludicrously out at heel—a perfect caricature of all that a soldier should be. But as the common Persian soldier never gets his pay, it having been swallowed up long before it can reach him by the various grades of those in authority over

him, and as he therefore has to pursue the ordinary avocations of life, in addition to soldiering, in order to secure a livelihood, it is perhaps too much to expect of him a smart uniform and an altogether military air. What sort of soldiers the three who stand gossiping and leaning on their rifles on the edge of the Quay would make if it ever came to a case of action it is difficult to imagine.

The charvadar is brought back at last, after every one available has been despatched in quest of him, laden with paper packages and a long roll of bread under his arm, totally unconcerned and unmindful of the fact that he has seriously delayed the start. The launch is off at last, however, and quickly covers the fifteen miles of sea. It is a glorious morning, fresher and clearer than a morning of English spring. The dull brown walls of the city, lit to every marvellous shade by the rising sun, sink slowly out of sight as the distance grows. Like some phantom city, it had risen to view straight out of the sea as one drew near; now, with every turn of the wheel, it sinks from sight as mysteriously as it had come, lost at last in a shimmering haze of sunlight, and engulfed in the waves that seem at once to guard and threaten its existence. Across the waters of the bay, at anchor, lie the 'Persepolis,' outwardly proud and trim, but inwardly a wreck, and the Indian marine gunboat, nothing to look at, but capable and ready for any emergency at a moment's notice, each typical of the nation it represents. Away in the distance, but every moment drawing nearer, is Shif. Seen from over the waters, vague and misty, it looked like some robber strong-

hold, some ruined fortress of the olden time. But as the launch draws near the mirage fades. The haze lifts, and all the mystery and illusion disappear. There is nothing at all at Shif save a square, solid caravanserai perched on a low mound of earth above the shore. One can only rub one's eyes and look again in a vain endeavour to conceive how that barren spot and uninteresting brick building can ever have been transformed into the thing of beauty and romance that the mirage made it.

Yet, as the first glimpse of Persia beyond Bushire, the starting place where the road actually begins, Shif is full of interest. On the shore many caravans have forgathered, some preparing for the start to Shiraz, others fresh from the arduous journey over the kotals. Innumerable mules and donkeys stand tethered, motionless save for a sudden whisk of the tail as they placidly munch the morning meal. Close by, are even now being landed hundreds of bales of goods which they will once more carry over the long and toilsome road that they must know so well. Round about the caravanserai, and on the walls, the charvadars lounge and gossip, passing from hand to hand the early morning *kalyan*, or discussing the incidents of the way, past, present, or to come. There is even greater difficulty in landing the mules at Shif than in embarking them at Bushire, for here they have to jump over the side of the boat and wade ashore. But the Persian has much patience, which it is necessary for the traveller also speedily to acquire if he wishes to enjoy the journey to the full. No Persian is ever in a hurry, and to-morrow will always do as well as, if not better than, to-day.

It is some time yet before one is finally on the way. The luggage has still got to accommodate itself to the exigencies of Persian travel and adapt itself to the mules' backs. The charvadar loads and reloads and readjusts it with true Oriental leisureliness before he is satisfied as to its setting. Even at the start, and in spite of many yards of stout rope, one views it with mistrust as the mules move off and the piled-up luggage sways ominously. The two holdalls and the tiffin basket even at this early stage suffer visibly from much tightly drawn rope, but already one has learned something of Persian indifference and placidity. This is Persia. Why worry? Nothing matters. 'Inshallah.'

The charvadar in charge goes on foot the whole way, but it is evident after the first few miles that he will not have much difficulty in keeping up with the caravan. The pace of the mules is a slow walk, urged only very occasionally and with much difficulty into a gentle amble. They are soon, however, to prove themselves surefooted beyond reproach and that in a march over the kotals is the first thing needful. Even over the sandy plain they persist in walking single file, doubtless from much climbing over the steep hill-side, where it is impossible for two to move abreast.

The Persian *tufangehi* is a most undesirable acquaintance, but it is impossible to avoid him on the road to Shiraz. Before we had gone a mile upon our way he had thrust himself upon our notice and unmistakably refused to be ignored. He is the official guardian of the road, armed and mounted, and clothed with much officiousness. If he did not insist

with much *empressement* on telling you who he was, and how necessary it was for your protection that he should accompany you for the first stage of the journey, you would have taken him for a brigand of the most abandoned type. It is delightfully typical of the way things are run in Persia that its own officials who are put there to guard the road are the only people who are likely to molest one by the way. If they insist upon thrusting their company upon a caravan, as they usually do, it is difficult to shake them off, and having accompanied one in spite of protests, it is difficult to get rid of them without the inevitable '*inam*' (tip), a word one soon gets accustomed to before one has been many days in Persia. If one is firm, however, a couple of krans apiece will generally induce them to retire after a brief spell of scout duty.

It is a long tiring journey, that first day's march from Shif. Over a bare sandy desert, beneath a merciless blazing sun, one crawls slowly on, seemingly aimlessly, with no beaten track to point the way. Beyond stretches the long blue grey range of hills, set like a barrier in the path. To the tired traveller, half-blinded by the glare of the sand in the noonday sun, they loom ahead like some brilliant mirage, close at hand yet ever receding as one advances. Mile after mile the mules plod doggedly on, yet making no visible impression on the distance that lies between. It is an extraordinary optical illusion. Near as the hills seem to be, hour after hour passes and we get no nearer. It is as if one followed some illusive goal that leads the traveller

on, then mockingly recedes, all as in some fairy tale of Persian telling.

There is scarcely a landmark by the way till one comes to Khushab. It is nothing but a cluster of huts and a clump of tamarisk trees, yet after a five hours' march in the sun it offers a welcome halting-place. Jaffir Khan is busy preparing the much-needed cup of tea almost before one is out of the saddle, while the mules, freed from their packs, abandon themselves to the joys of a roll in the sand. The villagers one by one close round, a picturesque collection, intensely interested, frankly curious and openly amused. One old man amongst the group there is whose memory goes back to the one historical event of which the village boasts. For, peaceful and far-removed from the stir of life as it now is, Khushab has for one brief moment played its little part in Persian history. It was in the Anglo-Persian war of 1856–57 and the Persian army lay at Borasgun, six miles away, some six thousand strong under the command of the Shuja-el-Mulk. At the end of 1856 the British troops under Sir James Outram had landed at Bushire, sweeping aside the faint resistance that they met with there, and pushing on to attack the main body of the Persian army at Borasgun. This unexpected energy on the part of the opposing force was more than the Persian soldiery had bargained for, and the whole army promptly turned tail and ran away. So hurried was their flight into the kotals that they left practically everything they possessed behind them to fall into the hands of the British. Outram, however, had no intention of being drawn into the difficult passes of the kotals, where all the

advantage would lie with the enemy; so leaving them to their own devices he began the march back to Bushire. The Persians, looking down from their retreat among the hills, saw the movement with astonishment, and altogether mistook its nature. Thinking that the English were running away, they hurried down in an excited rabble to press the advantage that they thought was theirs. Gathering together their scattered forces, they came up with the retreating army at Khushab and attempted a night attack. But Outram was not the leader to be caught napping, and within an hour the Persian army was again in full flight towards the hills. So unequal was the encounter that, though seven hundred Persians fell, the total English loss was only sixteen. Thus ended the sole engagement of the Persian army in the Anglo-Persian war of 1856–57. Khushab shows no signs to-day of its one brief spell of excitement, only one garrulous old man remaining to tell vaguely, as we rest beneath the shade of the tamarisk trees, of this the sole eventful incident of his childhood's days.

In the cool of the evening, six miles further on, the end of the long day's march is reached. For the last two hours the solid block of the caravanserai at Borasgun has stood out ahead, a welcome landmark against the sky. It is one of the finest serais in all Persia, and seen from a distance looks like some magnificent stronghold of the Middle Ages, with turrets, keep, and ramparts fortified against attack. It loses much of its impressiveness as one draws nearer, but it is still a handsome structure, dwarfing everything within its ken. Close

by lies the telegraph rest-house where rough quarters are at one's disposal for the night. Scorched and blistered by the sun and wearied by the long march, the traveller is grateful for small comforts, and the Armenian official in charge is hospitality itself, giving of his best from the limited means at his disposal. For the rest, Borasgun is nothing but a cluster of huts crouched together beneath the fitful shade of the great palms that tower above them.

What the dâk bungalow is to the Anglo-Indian traveller the caravanserai is to the Persian. In the large square courtyard in the centre, entered from without through the great arched gateway, there is ample accommodation for his beasts, while in one of the many rooms or deep recesses in the walls that lie behind the open verandahs he can take his rest and spend the night in comfort. In the inner rooms, lit only by the narrow doorways, it is delightfully cool even in the heat of the day, the walls being so enormously thick that the fiercest sun never penetrates. If the caravanserai is a large one, as at Borasgun, there are stables in the four corners, great dim-lit chambers vaulted and pillared, with exquisitely proportioned roofs like the crypt of a cathedral.

It is a picturesque sight at sunset. Through the gateway passes in a train of mules, heavily laden with wide bulging packs, that bump and jostle against each other as the tired beasts stagger wearily in. Leisurely the muleteer, burnt brick-red by the sun, frees them from their loads, and they roll in the soft earth of the courtyard, stretching their limbs with whinnies of delight. Already the court-

yard is well filled with other groups of tethered mules and ponies steadily munching the evening meal, every motion of their bodies expressive of infinite content and relaxation after the labours of the day. In many of the room-recesses round the walls the travellers have lighted fires and busily prepare a savoury meal against retiring for the night. The smoke curls up, half hiding them from view as they sit cross-legged before the steaming pot, passing the inevitable kalyan from hand to hand. Only the loud continuous munching of the beasts, the occasional stamp of a hoof, or the impatient whisk of a tail breaks the silence as night closes in.

Installed in the telegraph rest-house close by, there is little to interest or amuse, and for comfort only the bare necessities of life scantily supplied. There is something infinitely more attractive about the Persian caravanserai, an air of warmer welcome, even a greater sense of cheer and comfort, with a touch of that good fellowship which the road brings with it. The way to travel in Persia is doubtless to do, as far as one may, as the Persian does, but the Englishman, whose limbs are not adapted by Nature for squatting cross-legged on the floor or lying at night with only a rug between himself and the earth, clings to his chair and his bed with remarkable determination as long as either is to be had. Later on these may fail: it will be time enough then to do as the Persian does. So the first night passes in the bare little spare room in the telegraph rest-house with all the luxury of its one chair and a rickety bed, but wherein one gets a foretaste of the plague of all manner of undesirable creeping things that will

never leave one from here onwards till one gains the Caspian. A single one of these same creeping things would create a mild sensation if discovered in a respectable household at home, but somehow when they congregate in hundreds they have nothing of the same effect. It may be that familiarity breeds contempt. Anyway there they are. The two small packets of Keating's powder one has come provided with are ludicrously inadequate to the demand. There is nothing to be done. Why worry? Inshallah! The Persian, if he has ever noticed them at all, has obviously reasoned that way long ago, and such is the influence of place that the traveller finds himself accepting the inevitable with a complaisance that would have astonished him but a few days earlier, and will astonish him again in later days.

On the morrow, somewhat stiff and weary still from the first day's march, we take the road again towards the foot of the kotals. There are some fifteen miles yet to be traversed before the ascent begins, a long straight march across the sand with a swell of undulating country just before the end is reached. It is hotter even than the day before as the road runs nearer under the hills. A stream that crosses the way offers nothing of refreshment. Slow flowing, it is green with sulphur scum, and, far from cooling the air, it fills it with evil-smelling fumes that in the heat of the sun are well nigh suffocating. From a pit near by bitumen is extracted, the villagers using it as tar on the roofs and walls of their houses, while efforts have been made to work the petroleum springs that exist in the neighbourhood. But like most Persian enter-

prises they have failed for lack of capital and energy.

Daliki is a welcome spot after the blazing barrenness of the road. Shrub-grown, with its dwarf trees green beneath the dust, it stands between hill and plain, a midway halting-place between Borasgun away across the sand and Konar Takteh, the goal that lies beyond the first kotal. A splendid grove of date palms towers up over against the village, while nearer at hand a mud-built, fort-like homestead bears proudly like some escutcheon a stuffed leopard raised aloft above the gateway as spoil of some *shikari* or as death's-head warning to his fellows. The owner thereof, evidently hastily dressed in his best, comes with charming hospitality to offer a bowl of milk and the shelter of his house as one halts for the midday meal beneath the palm trees.

Beyond Daliki the ascent at last begins. Frowning and precipitous as the first climb looks, it is a welcome sight after the long level stretch of plain. The kotals which have so long hung against the sky line like some mirage of the air become things of stern reality indeed as one toils over rock and boulder, storming the first bulwarks of these magnificent defences that guard the heart of Persia. The mules, which have loitered over the plain and plodded on with protesting gait across the sand, seem suddenly to awake. Finding their footholds with unerring instinct, they clamber up the steep ascent struggling and determined, all that is best in them put forth to grapple with the difficulties of the way. Whatever of impatience or annoyance their leisurely plodding may have roused before is

speedily forgotten in admiration of their pluck and perseverance and surefootedness. Over the bare slippery surface of the rock they clamber, never failing, pausing only here and there to gather themselves together for the next step upwards.

From the summit of the first ascent there is a last glimpse of the plains. Seen from here they look to stretch away in one long unbroken reach towards the sea. It is a strange contrast from the view at Shif, where the plains, viewed from their own level, looked of no extent and the kotals to rise close by. Now the full distance lies revealed as on a map below, and there is something of satisfaction in seeing the extent of that long tiring march from Shif to Borasgun which looked at the outset so short, and proved in the end so long. Turning from the last glimpse of the sea which we shall meet no more for a thousand miles, the first descent begins. Two miles below runs the Daliki River, a hurrying torrent-stream lashing its pale blue-green surface to a froth of snow over the huge boulders that strew its course. For a while the path follows its left bank past a ruined bridge that once spanned it, but of which only a couple of arches still remain. On either side the barren rocks of the kotals tower straight upwards, as if they defied one to find foothold and to scale their heights. Further on a fine stone bridge, still perfect with its six neat arches, strikes something of a jarring note. It is the only handiwork of man in all this vast amphitheatre, and every stone in its trim arches and smooth paved roadway seems to cry aloud that man has robbed it from the hand of Nature and forced it against its will to order and

precision. The great rock cliffs on either side seem to look down upon it with frowning disapproval, and, still showing an unbroken front, force the path that crosses it to continue on its way along the further bank.

It is more than a mile before a break occurs and the ascent begins. Then, as one gazes up from below, it seems impossible that the mules, born mountaineers as they are, should ever reach the summit. It is an appalling climb. Known as the Kotal-i-Mallu, the Pass of the Hare, there is small wonder that most wayfarers, hauling themselves laboriously up its rocky slope, have unquestioningly accepted an earlier traveller's erroneous derivation and named it the Cursed Pass. Truly one needs the lightness and surefootedness of the hare to scale its slippery places. For the most part it is far too steep to ride, even if one had no regard for the plucky little mules who struggle on so gamely, and hour after hour on foot one slowly clambers up that seemingly endless track. Time after time the summit seems within reach, but every spur of the kotal surmounted only discloses yet other heights to be attained. Well may the traveller curse when, having dragged himself up the steep, almost trackless side of the rock, buoyed up by the hope that he is near the summit, he suddenly finds himself confronted with yet another vast expanse of rock up which the track winds, almost invisible, to its summit somewhere clear against the sky. It is a marvellous sight that, weary as the traveller is, cannot fail to appeal to his imagination. In every direction, far as the eye can reach, it is a world of

rock, of hill and valley, of crevice and ravine, of range on range, a mass of huge boulders and enormous slabs, rugged and precipitous, as if there had been some mighty upheaval of the earth in the beginning of time, and the rocks, flung hither and thither, had formed a marvellous world of their own, stupendous and primæval, in which man had had no part. Up one of the steepest ascents there runs a zigzag causeway of straight, even steps, contrasting sharply with the disorder and confusion on either side; but so slippery have the steps become, through long use, that the muleteers avoid them, beating out another track beside them, rougher and more tortuous, but giving firmer foothold for the mules.

Even the summit of the Pass of the Hare is reached at last. Then suddenly from the topmost ridge a new world opens out to view. It is one of those marvellously abrupt changes typical of Persia and the East. Looking backwards there is nothing but one vast undulating sea of rock with ridge on ridge of jagged summits, wild, barren, and destitute of every sign of life. Ahead, in strange contrast, stretches an enormous plain, shut in by a chain of the same rocky heights, but itself green and level, cultivated and bright with poppies and a hundred wild flowers. The young corn is a glorious green, waving gently in the evening breeze, that comes like a zephyr of the gods after the heat and toil of the Kotal-i-Mallu. Unbroken by hedge or plantation, the cornfields stretch right to the foot of the gorge beyond, some seven miles off. Midway across the plain stands the caravanserai of Konar Takteh, its turrets and battlements looking in the distance like

some old-world keep, raised to defend the pass against the robber bands to whom the frowning rocks on either side gave fitting shelter.

The rest-house, close by the caravanserai, is bare and cheerless in the waning light, but one has long since ceased to be critical. A meal and a bed are all one asks. Night falls as we settle in, and within an amazingly short space of time the faithful Jaffir Khan has produced a dinner that tastes marvellously good after the long day's march, and one has fallen asleep over the diary that it is such an effort to keep up to date in the brief margin that lies between the day on foot and the night of well-earned rest.

The third day on the march one wakes fresh and fit, all the stiffness of the day before worn off. And it is well that it is so, for ahead lies what is reputed the steepest and most difficult pass in all Persia. There is every inducement, too, to be up with the dawn, so that the day's march may end as near as possible to the famous rock sculptures of the once great city of Shapur, which will furnish so inexhaustible a source of interest on the morrow. It is a glorious ride to start with across the smiling Konar Takteh plain in the early morning, the air fresh and crisp, the whole wide stretch of green so full of life and health that, after the barrenness of the rocks that lie behind and frown ahead, this fertile valley seems verily to laugh and sing. And so on towards the foot of the hills that rise up like a barrier in the path, the entrance to the defile long hidden in their deep-serrated face.

At the foot of the kotals runs the Shapur River, a glorious expanse of curiously blue water, white-

flecked with foam. Along the ravine the road runs beside the river, the great rocks towering overhead on either side. Then with a sudden turn it leaves the river bank and, gently at first, as if seductively to lead the traveller upward, takes on a gentle gradient. The Kotal-i-Kamarij, so named after the plain that lies beyond its summit, is a far stiffer climb even than that of the Kotal-i-Mallu. Along deep crevices, between gigantic cliffs, the road nothing more than the bed of a rock-strewn stream with no foothold, save unseen hollows between the stones over which the water flows, it seems impossible that the mules should be able to make their way. Yet up, up with dogged energy they plant their strong sure feet, finding a footing where none appears. Along the narrow track, on one side the towering rock, on the other a yawning precipice, they still pass on apparently unconscious or unmindful of the danger. It would seem as if their feet must be cruelly twisted among the rocks and that they must fall lame, yet hour after hour they plod on surely, the pony for all his unpromising appearance as clever and surefooted as the mules.

Up from below comes the roar of the Shapur River, grown fainter or more insistent as the road winds, revealing glimpses of it far beneath, a blue-green streak frothing merrily over the stones. For miles one marches to the sound of running water from a hundred streamlets hurrying down deep gullies in the rocks to join it, their music the only sound that breaks the stillness. They seem to mock the stern forbidding rocks and boulders as, jostling down their steep and ragged sides, where none but they could

fall and live, they break in a thousand points of spray, unharmed and undiverted from their course below. Save for the movement of these countless streams there is no sign of life. Only they mock at the solemn grandeur of the scene. Of bird life there is none, and beasts of prey find little to lure them to the barren steepness of these forsaken passes. There is a loneliness about this great rock world that, grand and magnificent as it is, yet strikes a chill. It is a land deserted for all time of God and man and beast, where none tarries, and only the sound of hurrying footsteps breaks the all-pervading stillness. Such wayfarers as come this way move always quickly onward, halting only in rough temporary encampments, when needs must, as night falls, crouching together in a strange silence as they look out upon a silent world.

Above towers up the steepest ascent that lies between Bushire and Shiraz. Here the track rises no less than 1200 feet in a single mile. Winding zigzag up the steep rock face, in one ascent beyond another, it is literally a stairway cut in the inhospitable side of the cliff. Everywhere huge walls of rock rise upward sheer hundreds of feet straight skywards, like masses of sun-baked earth or huge unploughed fields stood up on end. Every conceivable formation is there, every fantastic shape formed by boulder and ravine. It is like some legendary home of the gods into which man has forced his way unbidden. On so colossal a scale itself, it dwarfs all else that comes in contact with it. Man, toiling up higher and higher in this great rock world, is like an ant, small and insignificant, struggling laboriously to force a path where nature

intended that none should be. Round the side of some huge promontory, a mass of jagged rocks above, a deep ravine below, along a rock-strewn path, guarded only here and there by a rough low wall of boulders, the road winds on, down steep descents into the bed of some hurrying stream, then up again, a sheer rock ladder where the countless mules which have passed this way have worn deep footholds, smooth and regular, as if hewn by the hand of man. These might indeed be stones worn by the feet of pilgrims, and this the way of sorrow to some sacred shrine.

So winding is the track that only a few yards of it ahead are visible. One climbs on endlessly, surmounting one summit that, clear against the sky, seemed the end of all things, only to find that line after line of hills stretch further up beyond and above. Even the plucky little mules at last show signs of distress, stopping from time to time to gather breath against a fresh attempt. The baggage from much jolting and slipping and banging against the rocks needs constant readjustment. The charvadar ties and reties the rope with more force than skill to the great detriment of the baggage itself, which under such rough treatment fast loses its self-respect. Finally, on one of the mules the much tried rope breaks with a snap, and one after another the roll of bedding and the Gladstone bags and the tiffin basket bump gaily a hundred feet down the *khud*, stopped mercifully in a crevice of the rock before they reach the river, that lies like a streak of white two thousand feet below. Then as one sits patiently waiting while the charvadar retrieves them, one

rejoices greatly that the tiffin basket contained nothing but enamelware! Had tea-pot and plate and cup and saucer been of china, one trembles to think of the extent of the disaster, for in the middle of Persia such things are not to be replaced. But as it is the damage is slight. The baggage wears a slightly more debauched and rakish look as it is once more made firm with a fresh supply of rope; a few more straps have broken, and the tiffin basket will no more fasten as a self-respecting tiffin basket should. But in the middle of Persia what do these things matter? Already one smiles at such trifling inconveniences almost as lightheartedly as the charvadar himself, taking the road again with much thankfulness that the damage was so slight and that it was not the will of Providence that the baggage should disappear down the *khud* for good and all.

So narrow is the road in many places that two laden mules cannot pass, and the charvadar must needs run on ahead to see that the way is clear. Just here, where the inconvenience is greatest, the road seems suddenly to wake to life. Caravan after caravan of mules and donkeys passes by, some of them heavily laden, others returning free, edging one close against the wall of rock to let them pass. It is well to take the inside berth lest their outspread packs edge one off the path and down the precipice. For the charvadar in charge of them is far behind and the mules plod on regardless of everything that may chance across their path. Their tinkling bells, often two most discordant ones on the same mule, give warning of their coming far along the hillside, jingling loudly as they clamber along the rugged

path. The donkeys are the pluckiest of little beasts. With huge bulging burdens that half hide them out of sight, and with often a peasant astride on top, they march along with a delightfully determined air. Never a one seems to lag by the way. On they tramp with their quick, decided steps, putting on a spurt from time to time as the charvadar bestirs himself with his whip. They seem unmindful of the blows and to harbour no resentment against the hardships of the road. Nothing could be a greater contrast to the dull, slow-moving Indian bullock, with his mild, complaining air, stolid and heavy, as if continually protesting against the hardness of his fate. The Persian donkey is all willingness and contentment, as if determined to do his best and take what comes. Hundreds of them are often to be met with in a single day's march, each one so like the other yet each a source of never-failing interest and delight. He who has seen the Persian donkey at work on his own hillside will keep an abiding respect for all his kind thereafter.

The summit reached at last, a wide fertile plain, shut in by a circle of hills, once more comes suddenly into view. It is an infinite relief again. The wonderful softness of the plain is like balm to the eyes after the dazzling glare of the rocks behind. It is all pastoral and rustic, an idyll of the spring. By the roadside immense flocks of sheep and magnificent long-haired goats graze contentedly, an urchin two feet high in charge. Beside a rough-built, thatched hut a group of wayfarers has stopped for the midday meal, their mules unladen and their packs so neatly stacked that, with a tarpaulin thrown

across, they form a sort of tent and shelter from the blazing sun. The inevitable glass of tea is being handed round as one approaches, and detaching himself from the group a youth comes forward to offer the stranger refreshment by the way, the glass piled high with sugar, as the Persian loves it. It is the most charming picture of hospitality one could well imagine. But, alas! the charm of it vanishes when 'inam' is urgently demanded after one has drained the glass. The tea is not unpleasant, in spite of its excessive sweetness, and though after long knowledge of the East and more than a glimpse of Persian habits one hesitates at first to drink it, a long hot ride in the midday sun, with no other drink available, soon banishes one's scruples. The charvadar seems to accept hospitality from every group we pass—either a drink of water from the curiously shaped skin bottles, a glass of tea, a pull at the ubiquitous *kalyan*, or a handful of the flat pancake-like Persian bread.

Leaving Kamarij to the left, with its solid-looking turreted *khan* and telegraph house, one follows the rough beaten road straight across the plain to the foot of the hills on the further side. Then over yet another pass, a thing of small account compared with those that have gone before, and along a strip of undulating country, one draws near at last to the end of the third day's journey. There is no telegraph rest-house here. The square half-ruined caravanserai that stands out across the bare deserted plateau is all the accommodation that Rahdar offers. Here for the first time one needs must do as the Persian does. This is altogether off the beaten track, and no more awaits one at the journey's end the

comfort of the scantily furnished room, the spring mattress, the table, and the chair. But if there is something of discomfort, it brings one closer into touch with Persian life and thought. In through the great wooden gateway, designed for strength in the old days when highway robbery was rife, the mules scramble over the cobbles into the courtyard, glad that the long day's work is done. Right and left runs a series of rooms, each with its outer verandah from which an open doorway leads into the room behind. The walls are so enormously thick that inside it is like a vault, chill and cold even in the heat of the day. Outside in the courtyard the charvadar unloads the mules and leaves them to roll in the dry loose earth—the only grooming they ever get. The courtyard itself is not of the cleanest, neither is the vacant room which on account of its most favourable situation one elects to occupy. It is just as the last occupant left it, and that occupant having been a Persian its state is better imagined than described. But the *sarbaz*, who seems to be in charge of the caravanserai, if possible more disreputable and brigand-like than any yet met with on the road, offers the best welcome he can, and soon has the room swept and made habitable. Considering the unsavouriness of the average Persian traveller, it is just as well that the rooms boast absolutely nothing in the way of furniture. With stone floors and walls it is easy to keep them clean, and one's own few possessions, unpacked and made ready for the night, soon give a touch of comfort to the otherwise cheerless quarters. Here, if not before, one feels that one is at last in Persia. Within sight

there is nothing of the West, save one's own few belongings.

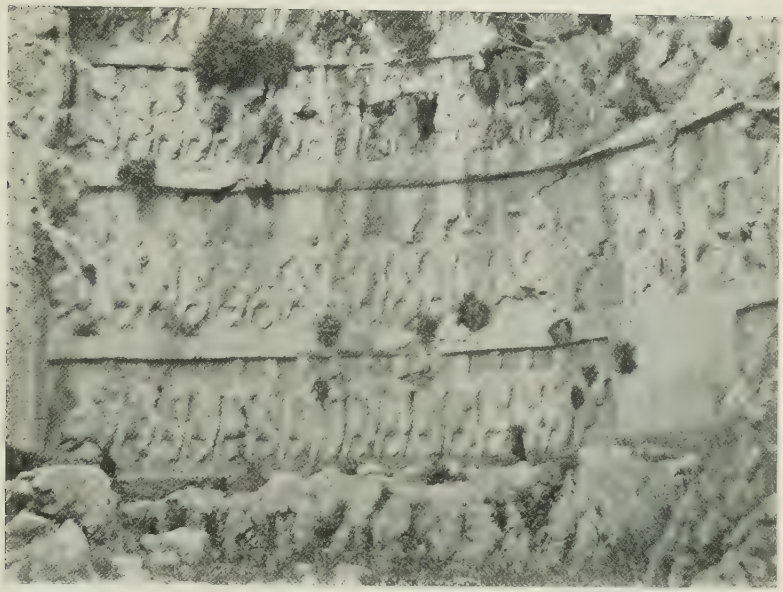
Outside, away across the plain, lies Shapur, the once great city of a great king. An abrupt opening in the rocks gives entrance into the wall of hills against the sky. The charvadar whose house is near by, tells of the sights that await us on the morrow. The sarbaz talks impressively of the dangers of the way, of thieves and brigands, and the fate that has befallen travellers in the past. Though the days of highway robbery, however, are by no means altogether past in Persia, one suspects the gallant sarbaz of designs to enhance his own value and to force himself upon one as an escort on the next day's expedition. Travellers are few who come this way to-day and this is a caravanserai off the beaten track, most of the wayfarers pushing on to Kawerun eleven miles further to the south-east, or eighteen miles east from Kamarij, which offers greater comfort and the more congenial society which the Persian traveller loves. So Rahdar stands apart, the great gates of the caravanserai closing at sunset on a well-nigh deserted courtyard. The three days' moon lies low over the valley, more marvellously clear and bright than it has ever seemed before. The sound of the Shapur River floats up from far away at the foot of the hills like faint music from another world. The ceaseless munching of the mules in the courtyard is the only other sound that breaks the stillness as darkness falls on one's first night in a Persian caravanserai.

CHAPTER IV

SHAPUR

Before the dawn the caravanserai is astir. It is the one brief moment of life and movement, ushering in the long, slow-moving hours that creep from dawn to sunset. Soon the heat and languor of the day will have reduced all living things to lethargy and drowsiness. Only in this swift-passing hour, that brings the light, do man and nature seem to awake to fullest consciousness of strength and vigour. Even the placid charvadar is roused to sudden energy, showing unwonted briskness in preparations for the start, while the mules, stung by the fresh keen air, hamper him at every turn in unaccustomed skittishness.

Early as one is, however, there is something, as usual, to delay one at the start. This time it is the charvadar himself. Suddenly, when all is ready, he feigns concern for our safety in the Shapur valley. It is notorious for its brigands, who are many, while there are but three of us, and he suggests an immediate return to the beaten track, leaving unexplored the wonderful rock sculptures we have come so far to see. To much surprised expostulation he pays no heed. The valley is too dangerous. It cannot be done. The mules are already laden waiting for



BAS-RELIEFS AT SHAPUR.

the start, but the charvadar is firm. Then the guile of the man at last appears. It might be possible, he says, if we had an escort. Simultaneously the sarbaz in charge of the caravanserai produces, from no one knows where, two others like unto himself, and the charvadar hails them as the saviours of the situation. If the saheb will consent to take them as escort the journey can be done with safety. Under their guidance there can be no fear. It is an admirably acted farce. The two soldiers of the Shah who are to protect us from the perils of the way are the most disreputable couple it is possible to imagine. Nothing one could meet on the road could well be more suggestive of the brigand. Dressed in the remains of uniforms which have long since lost their colour and shape, buttonless and open at the neck, trousers torn and boots heelless and well nigh soleless too, with their ancient matlock guns slung across their shoulders, they form a perfect caricature of all that a soldier should be. It is more than obvious that they are in league with the charvadar and hopeful that later on in the Shapur valley they may, if not actually play the brigand, at least extort all that is possible from the stranger in the way of an *inam*.

Facing one for miles across the plain as the Rahdar caravanserai is left behind, stretches what seems to be one long continuous line of rock. Even as the caravan draws near there is no sign of entrance. It seems once more as if the ascent must begin, as if the road must zigzag somewhere along the steep precipitous side of the cliff. High above the surrounding summits towers the Kaleh-i-Dokhter, the ruins of Shapur's great citadel; but it is not until

one is close at its feet that one sees that the rock on which it stands juts boldly outwards, the end of one long ridge but separated by a few hundred feet from the second ridge that runs behind it. Through the narrow entrance thus formed rushes the Shapur River level with the plain. Hitherto there has been nothing but the dead brown stretch of barrenness, out of which the line of treeless hills rises abruptly like some barrier raised by giant hands. Then suddenly, on turning the corner of the great out-jutting cliff of the Kaleh-i-Dokhter, there lies disclosed one of those sudden changes of nature in which Persia seems to revel. Here the gorge is scarcely a hundred yards in width, the rocks on either side towering heavenward, as if they had but just parted to let the impetuous river through. The steep banks of the rushing torrent are green with shrub and grasses, while the Shapur itself, still of that same wonderful blue-green brilliance, hurries over its rocky bed, the only busy, restless thing in all this great solemnity. Facing one another across it, carved seventeen centuries ago in the perpendicular sides of the rock, are the famous sculptures of Shapur, which neither time nor the still more vandal hand of man has had the power to destroy. The great work of the great king remains to-day almost as he would have wished it to remain, the wonder and admiration of all who pass this way.

Of the Kaleh-i-Dokhter there are only a few turrets and defences left; but towering aloft, even in decay they show how impregnable a citadel it must once have been. Stern and forbidding, it was surely in irony that Shapur christened it by so mild a name

as the Fortress of the Maiden. Than the commanding spur that ends abruptly, forming the entrance to the gorge, there could be no more perfect situation for defence. The gorge, the Teng-i-Chakan, here narrows to some three hundred feet, and the fortress crowning the heights at its mouth looks out on the one side far over the plain away to Rahdar and the hills beyond, while on the other it commands the full length of the gorge itself, which opening at its feet only to let the Shapur River pass broadens out to a wide and stony valley, closing in again five miles away to complete this vast amphitheatre of hill and plain. Opposite, across the narrow entrance through which the river flows, rises a sheer mass of rock, completing the impregnable defence. It is all magnificent, planned on a vast and generous scale, like some playground of the gods.

How imposing and extensive the citadel and city of the great king once were can still be traced in the ruins that crown the heights to-day. The steep sides of the rock are lined with the ruins of fortifications, line on line of wall forming an impregnable defence for the fortress, whose crumbling walls still stand up against the sky, silent but eloquent of a dignity and greatness that have long since passed. Persian tradition ascribes to it an origin older even than the time of Shapur, assigning it as yet another of the many conquests of Alexander the Great. But if it had a previous existence its history remains a sealed book, and for all time it will be known as the city of King Shapur. First of his name and second of the Sassanian line, he was one of the

greatest builders of his day, as well as one of the greatest warriors among Persian kings. Known to fame as the conqueror of the Roman emperor Valerian, this was but one of the many triumphs of his long thirty-two years' reign (A.D. 241–273). It is difficult now to picture a great and thriving city here in the midst of this desolate wild, shut in by range on range of hills on either hand, cut off alike from friend and foe. Yet this was the proudest city of the monarch whose chief delight was to give tangible proof of his splendour and magnificence in edifices of brick and stone. It was he who built or restored the famous city of Shuster, where he is said to have kept captive the emperor Valerian for seven years; and while other works associated with his name have doubtless been assigned to him by tradition, on the principle of to him that hath shall be given, some of the wonderful bas-reliefs at Naksh-i-Rustam, which are to be seen later on at Persepolis, are undoubtedly also his. There must have been something great and large-minded about this early Sassanian king who could conceive and plan works on so magnificent a scale, who could seize upon the great strategic works of nature and mould them to his own design. It may have been the petty desire to impress his greatness on the ages yet to come that prompted him, yet there was nothing small or petty about the monuments that he reared. The subjects of his great rock tablets may be boastful and vainglorious, but everything is forgotten in admiration of the man who could inspire their wonderful design and workmanship. After nearly seventeen centuries they

preserve his memory as no written history and no legend on the lips of the people could ever do.

Two of the six tablets are at the foot of the Kaleh-i-Dokhter, on the left bank of the Shapur River, the remaining four being carved on the face of the rock that rises up beyond the further bank. The first, after turning the corner of the gorge, is one of the smallest of them all, and has suffered more than any, either from natural decay or at the hands of the Arab conquerors, who, in senseless hate, destroyed the magnificent works of their predecessors which they could not hope to imitate. But what remains is strikingly realistic. The upper portion has almost entirely perished, but one figure stands out low down in the centre of the tablet, complete save for the features of the face. It is the figure of a suppliant, kneeling with arms outstretched and almost clasping the knees of a horse which comes towards it, but only the legs of which are still visible. The attitude of the kneeling figure, clad in a Roman tunic, is extraordinarily expressive of supplication and appeal. There is a simple dignity about its massive proportions. It is the pathetic figure of a strong man beaten, of one who had fought a good fight, and, vanquished, bowed the knee to the inevitable, making at last a full and complete surrender to his conqueror and to fate. Beneath the horse lies a prostrate figure, his head, with face turned upward and resting on his right arm, being actually beneath the charger's hoof. The scene is the triumph of Shapur over the emperor Valerian, who kneels before him, the fallen figure at his feet representing the vanquished Roman host.

The second tablet, a hundred yards further on along the left bank, is on a far grander scale and has suffered far less from the passing of the centuries. It is cut considerably deeper into the rock, a ledge of which, projecting above it, has doubtless done much to preserve it from climatic ravages. The panel itself is twenty feet high by forty-one feet long, the whole surface being covered with figures and representing a wonderful amount of skill and labour. In the centre is the chief group, occupying the full height of the tablet, some twelve feet long by eight feet high. A horizontal line on either side cuts across the right and left panels. On the left-hand side are two tablets, one above the other, covering the full height of the bas relief, while on the right-hand side there are no less than five separate tablets, three below and two above. The whole bas-relief is splendidly conceived and executed, but the figures lack something of the realism that so distinguished the figure of the suppliant in the first rock picture. The disproportion between the horse and its rider in the central group is one of the first things that strike the eye. Again it is the figure of Shapur, this time finely preserved, riding on horseback and crowned with the enormous Sassanian turreted crown surmounted by the orb. It is a striking figure, its dignity strangely little affected by its disproportion to the horse that it bestrides. The enormous strength of the charger itself doubtless helps to throw the disproportion into the background, for, small as it is for the figure it carries, the predominating note about it is its extraordinary strength of limb. The flowing locks of the king,

the beard tied in a knot on his breast, the flowing fillets from his crown, the heavy quiver at his side, are all still clear and distinct. Beside him, as he rides from left to right, stands a figure clad in a Roman tunic, his ankles fettered, but his head crowned with a wreath of laurels. The king holds him by the hand, as if he led him forward, not as captive, but as one whom he delighted to honour. In front of them is a third figure kneeling. This again, in all probability the figure of the conquered Roman emperor, kneels stiffly, almost decorously, like some mediæval knight in an English church. Yet here surely, if ever, there was room for expression, for the figure whom the great king leads by the hand would seem to be that of Cyriadis, the obscure Syrian of Antioch, whom he was about to invest with the imperial purple as the successor of the conquered Valerian. On this tablet is one of the only two inscriptions at Shapur. It is engraved just in front of the charger's head in fine lines in the Pehlevi character, while above a winged cherub offers a scroll of parchment to the king.

On the two tablets behind the king, as if following him, are lines of mounted men, the horses and their riders cut with wonderful regularity and presenting all the appearance of cavalry in motion. They evidently represent the royal attendants, most of them being warriors, some armed, others simply uplifting the right arm, the forefinger pointed in the Sassanian attitude of respect. In the five tablets on the other side the figures are on foot, some of them carrying arms, others empty-handed—whether they

are courtiers of the king or soldiers of the vanquished army it is difficult to determine. The whole tablet, though somewhat stiff and formal, eloquently represents the pomp and magnificence of Sassanian times. Looking at it, one can almost conjure up again the scene that must have taken place, doubtless amidst all the stateliness and splendour with which the conqueror could invest it, when the pride of Rome was humbled in the dust before the great Sassanian monarch.

The Shapur River is in flood, and the crossing over to the rock tablets on the other side is not easy. Shallow and bubbling lightly over the stones for many a mile, it here flows over deep hollows, and it is not until one has gone some way along the bank that a crossing can be made. The four rock tablets on this further side are far more difficult of access than those just seen. The latter are on a level with the bank, which opposite to them is conveniently wide. On the right-hand side, however, the bank has undergone considerable changes; the rock panels now stand some twenty to thirty feet above the river bed. In some places access to them would be difficult were it not for an aqueduct tunnelled in the cliff itself at a later day to carry the water of a spring from the hillside to a mill that once existed in the plain below. It is astonishing to see how ruthlessly these magnificent bas-reliefs have been disregarded for this material purpose. The whole level of the bank has been altered, and the sculptures so utterly regarded as a thing of nought, that the aqueduct runs clean across the face of one of them, cutting it in half, so that the

carving is altogether obliterated where the stream once ran.

The first tablet as one walks back again down stream, after crossing, is the crudest of all the six both in design and workmanship. Thirty-four feet in length, it is divided into two rows of figures, one above the other, its chief peculiarity being that the most prominent figure, that of the king, looks straight out from the panel, facing the spectator. That the sculpture is later than the time of Shapur is evident, and the fact that the only monarch on the Sassanian coins who looks outwards instead of sideways, leaning both hands on his sword, is Chosroes Nushirwan, has led to the supposition that his is the figure on the panel. Here, however, if the figure be his, he holds in his uplifted hand what looks to be a battle-axe, while his left hand rests on the hilt of his sword. On his head he wears the double crown, his hair elaborately dressed on either side. In the right-hand upper panel are two captives, led by Persian guards, while in the opposite left-hand panel stand a row of courtiers, their right arms raised with uplifted finger in token of respect Below in the right-hand corner there is a wonderful variety of figures, prominent among them a boy riding an elephant and a man holding two human heads in his hands, as if he were offering them to the king as the heads of his vanquished foes. Behind follows a crowd of prisoners and attendants. On the opposite lower panel is the king's charger, saddled and equipped, the royal courtiers, garbed and accoutred like their master, following closely in its rear. The whole forms a most ambitious tablet, but

its workmanship is not equal to the earlier ones. It is evident that it was executed when the great and strenuous days of Shapur were over, and when the fatal decadence that so soon attacks an Eastern dynasty, once its heyday has passed, had already begun.

The next tablet is also of later date than Shapur I, though from the Pehlevi inscription which is cut in the right-hand corner it would appear that the central figure represents his son. The inscription runs:—

'This is the image of the Ormuzd worshipper, the divine Narses, King of Kings, of Iran and Aniran, of the race of the gods, the son of the Ormuzd worshipper, the divine Shapur, King of Kings, of Iran and Aniran, of the race of the gods, the grandson of the divine Artakshatr, King of Kings.'

Narses reigned from A.D. 292 to 301, and is generally supposed to have been the grandson or great-grandson of Shapur; but unless the word 'son' is used vaguely for 'descendant,' as often in Oriental speech, the inscription would seem to leave no room for doubt. In the panel there are two figures on horseback facing each other. The one on the left is that of the king, the figure on the right being that of the god Ormuzd or Ahuramazda, whose extended right hand holds the cydaris or royal circlet with streamers, which the king in turn extends his right hand to receive. Both figures and horses are most elaborately and minutely carved. The god Ormuzd wears a turreted crown, pushed off from his face, his hair worn long, and streaming above and behind it in flowing locks. The king wears a spiked coronet,

surmounted by an enormous globe, his hair, long and bushy, escaping from beneath it. The features are astonishingly well preserved, the expression being markedly mild and dignified. The horses and their accoutrements are all perfect even to the veins that stand out on their forelegs as if in motion. The whole tablet is some sixteen feet high, and the watercourse has fortunately done little damage beyond obliterating all below the horses' knees.

The next tablet—the last but one—has been cut right across by the watercourse. Fortunately both the upper and lower portions are well preserved, a strip across the centre only having been completely washed away. There has been some question as to whom the chief figure on horseback represents, but about the subject there can be no doubt. It is again the triumph of a Sassanian king, who rides out to receive the submission of a vanquished army. The features of the king are so like those of the great Shapur that it is difficult to believe that it does not represent him. On his head, however, he wears a helmet out of which rise two wings, the conventional globe between them, a headdress seen for the first time elsewhere on the coins of Varahan II. (A.D. 275–292). From this it has been concluded that the panel represents the triumph of that monarch over the people of Seistan, whom he reduced to submission. There is nothing else sufficiently distinctive about the figure of the king to help towards a decision. The hair worn long as usual, and elaborately dressed, the royal circlets, and the enormous quiver might belong either to Shapur or to Varahan. Facing him, standing alone, slightly ahead of those

who come behind, is a figure, evidently that of a soldier, girt with a sword and wearing a close-fitting cap from which the hair escapes in bushy ringlets. Behind, on the same level, is a horse, badly obliterated, and three figures wearing curious close-fitting caps with flaps behind and clothed in long flowing robes that reach the ground. At the back of these figures and above them, as if they moved on a higher level, are two camels each with its driver. The whole, in addition to its sadly marred aspect from the action of the watercourse across its face, has something of an unfinished appearance, the figures on the extreme right merging irregularly into the rough surface of the rock. Yet in it is some of the best workmanship. The splendid figure of the king, the expression of submission in the attitude of the captives, the dignity of the whole, make this panel one of the most remarkable at Shapur.

The last bas-relief is perhaps the most elaborate of the six. It consists of a huge panel, some thirty feet in length by seventeen feet high, covering a semicircular curve in the rock; and here again the watercourse that ran at its foot has done much damage. There are four different scenes, one above the other, and reaching the full length round the semicircle, the two lower panels being nearly double the height of the two upper ones. The chief figures occupy the middle of the second row from the ground. Most prominent among them is that of King Shapur himself, similar in relief and in setting to the second tablet across the river at the foot of the Kaleh-i-Dokhter. Mounted, he leads by the hand another figure, doubtless that of Cyriadis garbed as a Roman,

his horse trampling underfoot a fallen foe, while in front kneels again the emperor Valerian in an attitude of submission and supplication. A new figure is introduced behind the kneeling emperor, that of a man holding out a royal circlet to the king, doubtless with which to crown Cyriadis. Behind the king, on all four tiers, are represented his guards and courtiers, fifty-seven figures in all, each with the forefinger uplifted in the attitude of respect. Facing him on the same tier is a double row of what would appear to be the chargers of the fallen emperor, and an elephant, led by a double row of retainers. Below, on the lowest tier, is a Roman chariot, drawn by two horses, and the captured Roman eagle escorted by a crowd of attendants carrying gifts. The two topmost tiers are full of yet other attendants, leading two leopards, and bearing the spoils of victory before the king.

It is hard to tear oneself away from Shapur. There is something strangely fascinating about these magnificent pictures of past days, graven imperishably on the hard bare surface of the rock. Here to-day in the twentieth century they unroll before one's eyes the history of sixteen hundred years ago, giving it life and actuality and movement as nothing in cold print could ever do. In full view, the chief actors in these great dramas of a bygone day hold the stage, dressed and accoutred as they were in life, the very men who once held camp and court in this now deserted valley and climbed the steepnesses to the fortress overhead. Here, as in life, kneels the proud Roman emperor Valerian, humbled in the dust and making

due submission to the conquerer in our very presence. Shapur, the originator and designer of this once great city, rides proud and triumphant to receive his homage beneath our gaze. So realistic are they that it requires but little imagination to bring them again to life, and people once more these now deserted wastes with kings and courtiers and the vast armies that followed in their wake. Straight from the third century they give us their message in the twentieth, triumphing over the difficulties of tongues, and plain for the stranger from any land to read aright. In the great silence of deserted hill and plain they stand to-day imperishable, defiant of the ravages of time and man, mute yet eloquent witnesses of the greatness of Sassanian days.

There is one more survival of man's handiwork at Shapur—the statue of the king himself, as great a wonder as any that has gone before. It lies further up the valley, on the right-hand bank of the river, but far above it, high up, at the entrance to an enormous cave in the face of the cliff. It is a long steep climb before the cave is reached. But the only access is from below. Above, the cliff towers skywards some seven hundred feet, straight into the air. The entrance to the cave, small as it had looked from below, is enormous when at last it yawns close before the climber, some one hundred and forty feet long by fifty feet high. Cut apparently out of the solid rock, just within the entrance, once stood the colossal statue of Shapur. It lies now broken and defaced beside the pedestal on which it stood, the head half buried in the earth, as if the proud figure, forced from its high state to bite the dust, sought to

hide its face from the curious who come to see its shame. How the statue fell it is impossible now to say; but so enormous is it, and so completely was it once a part of the cave itself, joined to it head and foot in solid rock, that it seems impossible that any force save deliberate violence at the hand of man could have cast it from its place. The huge pedestal on which it stood still remains, some ten feet in diameter by five feet high, and upon it are the sandalled feet of the great figure that once surmounted it. The fact that the feet are thirty-nine inches in length gives some idea of the colossal nature of the statue. The breadth of the shoulders is eight feet and the length of the headdress thirty-six inches. The full height of the statue, reaching to the roof of the cave, must have been some twenty feet. The features have been so badly, and apparently wantonly, mutilated that it is impossible now to trace any likeness between them and the face of the king as depicted on the rock sculptures. Upon his head is the Sassanian crown, his hair elaborately dressed above and below it. His dress consists of a close-fitting garment like a coat of mail above the waist, and below he wears the loose Persian trousers. His sword slung from a sash over his right shoulder lies by his left side, with a cross-belt meeting it from the left with a knot of ribbons for ornament to complete the whole. It is a magnificent figure even as it lies maimed and prostrate, with its air of having been violently cast down from the pedestal which now gapes vacant beside it. There could be no more striking picture of greatness laid low than this fallen figure at the entrance to the great cave

where it once stood proud and steadfast, and worshipped as a god.

Beyond the entrance lies an enormous cave from which open out many dim mysterious passages that still remain unexplored. Everything is on a colossal scale. In one place, not far from the entrance, the cave gradually opens into a vast chamber, one hundred and twenty feet long by one hundred feet high. Beyond this lies yet another room, damp and uncanny, with great stalactite pillars hanging from the roof. Again beyond lie other passages which the native guides tremblingly declare have no end, and which they show a firm determination not to penetrate. No one, they maintain, has ever been further than where we now stand, and they will not be the first to go. How these marvellous caves came into existence, half way up the steep side of the cliff, must always remain a mystery, though that they were very largely the work of man can hardly be disputed. In those far-off days of Sassanian supremacy no work seemed too impossible, no undertaking too colossal, to the vaulting ambition of the great Shapur and his successors. So, though they themselves have long since slept their last sleep, and their lives lie buried in the past, their works survive, the wonder and admiration of all time.

CHAPTER V

A NIGHT IN A PERSIAN HUT

So long has been spent in exploring the fascinating ruins of Shapur that, in spite of the early start, midday has long passed before we are again on the road. The charvadar is strongly against retracing our steps to rejoin the road to Kawerun and urges a short cut up the valley to join the main road further on at the foot of the Mian Kotal. It is somewhat of a rash undertaking, for the chances of reaching the Mian Kotal rest-house before nightfall are few, and there is no caravanserai in between. The proposed road, however, is along the Teng-i-Chakan off the beaten track, and in that lies its chief charm. If Mian Kotal is not reached before dark the choice will lie between a night in the open or in a Persian hut. Neither would have sounded exactly desirable a few days before, but already something of the Persian insouciance, the readiness to take what comes and make the best of it, or it may be something of the spirit of the road, has entered into one. The valley looks fair and smiling, a glorious patch of green on either side of the hurrying river, shut in by the towering rocks on either hand. To escape from the telegraph poles is to break the last link with civilisation, and the charvadar has his way. Regretfully at last we turn our backs upon Shapur and set our

faces along the valley, with many a backward glance at the great rock fortress which so long dominates the scene at the end of the pass.

First, however, there is the gallant escort to be dismissed. Though they have only brought us to the head of this valley, the dangerous character of which they have so much impressed upon us, they have evidently begun to think that they have done enough for one day's work and to secure for themselves a fat *inam*. They prepare to return to their homes forthwith, and hint by no means gently that they only await the liberality of the saheb to take their leave. But since they have been of no use whatever, one's idea of what is due to them, it is evident, will hardly coincide with their own views on the subject. For a moment it looks as if there might be trouble. All their subservient politeness disappears in a flash. No brigands on the road could possibly be more formidable. Holding the coins that have been presented to them contemptuously on their outstretched palms, they let forth a flow of language that one can only deeply regret one's command of colloquial Persian does not permit one to follow. Though unintelligible, it sounds so forcible that one feels that, had one only been able to grasp it, one would have had a vocabulary at command to last to the Caspian and beyond. But a show of determination soon proves them to be only men of many words, and they finally take themselves off, still shouting imprecations that make the valley ring, the charvadar lagging behind doubtless to exact his toll for delivering the stranger into their hands.

It is a glorious ride along the river bank. On either side the great cliffs shut in the green and fertile valley, the Shapur River, gloriously blue and white as it froths over the stones, winding full length along it. One peak in the far distance, in spite of coming summer, still keeps its crown of snow. Elsewhere the jagged cliffs, grand and impressive, frown bare and desolate. Here and there huge caves yawn high up in the rock face, seeming as if cut by the hand of man, yet so placed that Nature only, in capricious mood, could have been responsible for their design. Not until the far end of the valley is almost reached is there any sign of human habitation. Even then it is only the most temporary of encampments of the Mamasenni Iliats, a wandering people who frequent these valleys with their flocks and herds, moving on continually from camp to camp, and from higher to lower latitudes and back again as the seasons change. Their encampments, many more of which are to be met with later on, are as primitive as they well could be. Occasionally they build mud-huts with reed-thatched roofs, but more usually they are content with a shelter of coarse black canvas, raised unsteadily on upright sticks in the ground, with no attempt at form or symmetry. The nomads themselves have all the picturesqueness of the wandering Gipsy, the men well built, with pleasant, smiling countenances, the women busy with their household duties, unconcerned by the unaccustomed passing of a stranger, and with no false modesty attempting to screen their faces from his sight. But such an encampment is best viewed from a distance, where its

picturesqueness, situated low down by the river-side, or high up on the slopes with its flocks and herds covering the hills beside it, is a thing of joy. A closer acquaintance, alas! reveals only its more unpleasant side, for, with the nomad, cleanliness is as little a tradition as godliness, and the unblushing filthiness of his encampments is better imagined than described.

Passing through the gorge that closes in this end of the Teng-i-Chakan, broader and less strategic than that commanded by the Kaleh-i-Dokhter at the further end, yet another valley, the Dasht-i-Pariab, is disclosed to view. The Shapur River still flows through it, and again on either side tower huge rock cliffs, but the valley itself is on a far larger scale than the Teng-i-Chakan, and it is many miles before the hills narrow and meet together again in the far distance. It is a greener and more luxuriant valley, too, aglow now with all the wonderful freshness of a Persian spring. Further on the whole valley is studded with trees, one long grass-grown, park-like stretch, with patches of cultivation here and there, the brilliant green of the young wheat adding its exquisite touch of colour to the whole. The flocks and herds grow more numerous, the long-haired goats, glossy and well fed, grazing in hundreds along the river bed. But of human habitation there is scarcely a sign in the valley itself. The flocks apparently feed untended, or herded only by a single shepherd, often the smallest of urchins, but capable and armed with an air of command. The wheat and rice fields seem as if, once ploughed and sown, they had been left to guard themselves until the time of harvest.

It is only along the slopes of the hills to the left that the haunts of man are anywhere visible. Perched high up and crowning eminences above the valley are many of the picturesque little fort-like buildings that have already grown familiar to the Persian traveller, burnt the colour of the rock on which they stand, the colour of sun-dried clay.

Further along the valley, half way up the side of the hill, is the village of Nudan, one of the largest and most solidly built that has yet been met with on the road. As one draws near its absolute silence grips one, calling to mind again the first impression of Bushire. It seems impossible at first that it can be aught but a deserted city or some city of the dead. There is not a sign of life. Its long low buildings, imposing at a distance, but made only of sun-baked mud, with scarce a window looking outwards, give it a closed-in, mournful air. The carefully walled gardens and the sombre dark green cypresses but add to its desolate, melancholy air. Silent, perched on the steep hillside, it stands aloof, looking out over the valley, as if it brooded over some great remembered past, reserving no interest for the degenerate present, and ignoring in its great loneliness and isolation the trivial things of modern days.

The charvadar directs the caravan by a tortuous course, first guiding it almost to the foot of the hill on which Nudan stands, then turning abruptly and making again towards the centre of the valley. There is nothing here that can be called a path or even a foot-track. The valley in its virgin freshness looks as if it might have been untrodden since time began. For miles now it is studded with trees, like

one long, continuous orchard. The ground beneath is a perfect carpet of green, gay with a hundred wild flowers, broken only here and there by plots of cultivation seemingly set down at hazard, strange regular plots of growth of man's making amidst the wild. Many of the trees are oaks, not the great wide-spreading oaks of England, but smaller and more stunted. They resemble at first sight the English apple tree far more than the English oak, and it is this resemblance that gives the whole valley so much its orchard-like appearance. On and on for miles the caravan moves slowly, always to the sound of running water from the Shapur River at the foot of the further hills, over the greensward ablaze with poppies beneath the grateful shade of the oaks. Beyond, through the trees, come glimpses of the great brown-purple hills, ending far off in a snow-clad peak, clear cut against the cloudless blue of the Eastern sky. Mile after mile, hour after hour, the way lies along this same wonderful valley, always the same, yet always with some changing point of view to lend new interest to the road.

The glare of the afternoon is over, and the sun sinks lingeringly as if loth to leave the valley and dim its brilliance into shadow. Even in the shade of the trees it has been a long and thirsty ride, and a rest for tea by the river bank is welcome to beasts and men alike. Here the river is overhung with willows that, bending down, lap their branches in the stream. Thick rushes and reeds crowd its bank and bed. The river itself is broader here than it has yet appeared, its surface less broken by foam, calmer and more placid, yet blue-green as ever as it

passes on to race through the gorges further down the valley.

Rapidly it grows to sunset, and thoughts of a shelter for the night perforce obtrude themselves. The charvadar when consulted is evidently on an unknown track. There is no caravanserai nearer than Mian Kotal—of that alone he is sure. Mian Kotal may be six or it may be twelve miles away; of that he cannot speak with certainty. There is obviously no possibility of reaching it that night in either case. He knows of no village nearer at hand, yet he insists that it is impossible to travel at night. He becomes suddenly voluble and very decided indeed when that is mooted. This valley, like the Teng-i-Chakan, is notorious for brigands, and the charvadar launches out with a story of a wealthy Persian who was robbed and beaten not long since along this very road. The story is vague and improbable, but the charvadar believes it firmly. Besides, there are wild beasts to be feared. It is as equally impossible to spend the night in the open as to continue on the march. Yet the charvadar has no other alternative to propose. There is obviously nothing for it but to go on and hope to find some shelter for the night before darkness falls. The mules, who have been on the move since daybreak, save for the few hours' rest at Shapur, drag wearily, and the baggage hangs askew as if it too protested against the length of the way. The anxiety of the charvadar increases as the shadows deepen. All his cheeriness and assurance of the day are gone. He is responsible for the caravan, he whines, and night alone in the valley is not to be contemplated. Yet

there is no sign even of cultivation now along the river bank, and for the last five miles or more no living creature has come within our ken.

The whole valley is lit with strange fantastic lights. The sun has set full behind the snow-clad peak outlining it in glory of purple and gold. Above, the eastern sky is one vast expanse of deep magenta, breaking slowly, minute by minute, into wonderful shades of orange and red, the whole a riot of Oriental colour that throws weird, ghostly shadows below along the valley. It is like the first false dawn. A strange uncertainty is in the air, born neither of night nor day. Every moment the light between the trees changes. The greensward is lit with almost as many colours as the river, which reflects more clearly every passing shade in the sky above. Then suddenly with Eastern swiftness night falls and the green and smiling valley of the day has gone. In its place has come a thing of dark shadows, lonely and forbidding. The solitude that was a joy by day becomes a terror, vague and undefined, by night. Something of the fear that has transformed the charvadar into a shivering coward is half understood. A jackal howls suddenly almost beneath one's pony's feet, slinking away with piercing melancholy cries that find answer further down the valley in long-drawn howls of sympathy. Only the river still remains a thing of light, keeping the last reflection of the day long after all else in the valley has given itself over unto night.

The mules stumble protestingly on in the almost total darkness. The charvadar, if left to himself, would sit down forthwith and weep and give himself up for

lost. Limp and terrified and full of deep forebodings, he is an amazing contrast to the cheerful, rather swaggering muleteer of the journey hitherto. Suddenly, however, he comes to life again. Stopping short and pulling up the mules he listens attentively, his ear towards the ground. Far off he has heard sounds which only he, who has lived close with nature, could hear across so great a distance. There are human habitations, within reach, and the muleteer is a man again, encouraging the tired mules with strange cries half to cheer them, half to give vent to his own joy at coming comradeship. Gradually the trees open, revealing in the dim light patches of cultivation on either side of the path and behind a group of huts. The charvadar shouts aloud with delight as dim figures move out of the dusk in front of the huts, all agape, to watch our coming. The arrival of a caravan is an altogether unprecedented event in this secluded village, and the charvadar explains in rapid sentences, almost falling in his joy on the necks of these unknown villagers as if they were his long-lost friends. Their rapid patois it is impossible to follow; but the first inquiries over, the oldest man in the group, a venerable patriarch with flowing white beard, steps forward with a welcoming 'bismillah,' offering all the hospitality his village can afford. The welcome is a charming one, phrased in the mellifluous Persian tongue that lends itself so readily to courteous speech. Unfortunately, however, the means of accommodation at his disposal are distinctly limited. All he has to offer is a small square building, consisting of a single room, of rough built stone and flat thatched roof, a tiny doorway

some four feet high its only entrance and means of ventilation. The old man offers it with simple dignity, unconscious of its utter undesirability in the stranger's eyes. It is the best that he has, and as such he offers it. But a glance inside is enough. A fire smoulders in one corner of it, and there being no exit for the smoke and no other light there is little else visible. It is cold outside, but a night in the deck-chair, wrapped in every available coat, seems infinitely preferable to a closer acquaintance with the Persian hut. Almost the whole village has turned out by now, eager to see the stranger who has arrived so unexpectedly within its gates. It is a merry crowd, frankly interested and curious, and passing remarks from time to time doubtless on one's belongings or personal appearance that bring forth open laughter from the younger members. They are all, however, most anxious to help as the charvadar unloads and Jaffir Khan sets about preparing dinner in these unpromising surroundings.

A fire of logs, that glows and sparkles in the cold night air, is soon lit in the open. Round it, on the further side, the villagers draw in, forming the most picturesque group imaginable. Squatting on the ground, cross-legged, in a semicircle, they settle themselves with every sign of pleased anticipation to await events, their large dark eyes fixed unblinkingly upon the stranger and following his every movement. The road this way is unfrequented and dangerous. A robbery, they say, is by no means uncommon. They fear to travel themselves by night, for the wandering tribes spare not even the poorest among them. The chief of the village, Gholam Reza by

A PERSIAN HUT.

name, the old man with the venerable beard, reminding one of some patriarch out of one's childhood's Biblical picture books, commands universal respect. He sits close at one's feet at the end of the semicircle, with a small child, his youngest son, beside him. Near by squat two other children, one with a gorgeous pair of putties thrust well out into view towards the blazing logs. The putties are of variegated wool, which their owner proudly claims to have knitted himself as he tended the flocks. He is only eight years old, with the face of a cherub, but the old man shakes his head over him. 'As a young ram,' he says with mock severity, 'as wayward and unreliable.' Only the day before he slept while the goats he tended wandered far down the valley, and they had only been gathered in again with difficulty as night fell. The patriarch shakes his head, yet with a smile at the culprit, as if he who least deserved it was most loved. Further round the semicircle, a youth with thick black beard, his face burnt brick-red by the sun, his blue smock open at the neck, and his black locks carefully curled, whispers cheek by jowl with another, younger, and with features more refined, clad in loose red coat with black round cap. Beside them the older men, singularly unkempt compared with their neighbours, smoke solemnly the inevitable kalyan. Nearer, on the other side, sits alone a young man in his first youth with a fine clear-cut face, clean-shaven, blue-smocked—a peasant, yet with the grace and charm of a prince. Behind, out of the firelight, move dim shapes, revealed for a fleeting moment in the shadows—a girl, carrying an infant slung on her back, clad in a gorgeous garment,

stealthily watching out of coal-black eyes, or a woman cowled in sombre black, only a portion of her face visible as she takes her turn at the kalyan like a man. The fire flares up and flickers down, alternately revealing and hiding those behind, throwing for a moment a glimpse of a new face on the canvas, then folding all in shadow.

Dinner, which perforce must be eaten in full public view, arouses intense interest. New logs thrown on the fire reveal a ring of faces open-mouthed with curiosity. A knife and fork are things unseen, unheard of hitherto. For the most part there is a breathless silence. Only occasionally is it broken by a gasp of surprise or a buzz of talk. 'The saheb has fingers; why does he not use them?' asks the child at the old man's feet, in an audible whisper, as the knife and fork first come into play. The making of soda-water in the sparklet syphon is a mystery which savours of magic, and is accordingly regarded with great distrust. Some meat lozenges, carried in case of emergency, and not yet needed, excite the same suspicion. One of them is handed round with interest, but each one shirks the risk of eating it. Even after the saheb himself has eaten one, there is still hesitation and much amused discussion. At last the youth with the face of a cherub and the waywardness of a 'young ram' stretches out his hand for it and examines it closely. Slowly he looks round from face to face as if to reassure himself that he has riveted the full attention of the group, and then, to the general astonishment and admiration, he puts it in his mouth. The faces round the fire are a study, fixed in fascination as if they

expected immediate and terrible results from so rash an act. And they are not disappointed. For a moment the taste of the lozenge does not make itself felt. The face of the child is heroic as he looks around, again drinking in the wonder and admiration of the group. Then suddenly the unknown taste begins to work and the sublime self-confidence drops like a flash from his face. One moment he is torn between his desire to remain the object of interest and centre of the group, and his instinctive fear of the unknown. But the latter quickly proves itself the stronger, and with a wry face he spits out the lozenge, to the general and hearty amusement of the crowd.

Gradually the group thins. One by one the watchers rise and move away. 'Khuda hafiz' is the final leave taking, 'Khuda hafiz shuma' the unvarying reply. 'God be with you,' 'And with you also.' A small company still lingers on into the night. The child, the old man's youngest son, one of the most interested and insatiable of watchers, half falls asleep at last, and the chief sends him away to bed, sleepy but protesting. He himself will remain with the saheb throughout the night. Another has already brought for him his roll of bedding from the hut, and spreading it on the ground and rolling himself in it until only his head is visible, he soon falls asleep. Three others also keep us company, lying full length, their feet towards the fire. The Westerner has none of the same facility of sleep as the Oriental, and one is soon the only being left awake. But the day's march has been long and tiring and sleep does not long delay.

Waking with a start an hour later at the howl of a jackal close by, it is a strange scene that meets the eye. The fire still smoulders, casting a ruddy glow over the sleeping figures that lie like mummies wrapped in their rugs beside it. The old chief lies at full length on his back, his hands folded on his breast, his fine straight features and white beard full in the light of the fire, looking like some warrior asleep or a figure carved in stone. Beyond the immediate circle of the fire all is darkness. Nothing is visible save the dim outlines of the huts close by. Overhead the stars blink clear in a cloudless sky. There is no sound save the croaking of frogs afar off or the moving of the cattle in the byre close by. It is a stillness that soon again induces sleep, triumphing even over the unaccustomed attitude in a folding chair.

It is the unexpected patter of rain that rouses one the second time. The stars have disappeared and the sky looks black and threatening. The fire has gone out and pitch darkness reigns. There is nothing for it but to take refuge in the hut which one had so contemned when the sky was clear. The remains of the fire inside are quickly stirred into life again, filling the low-raftered room with such clouds of smoke that one is well nigh suffocated. The room itself is so small that the old man and two others, oneself and one's belongings, almost completely fill it, to the indignant protest of a hen and five chickens and a goat and two kids, who have hitherto enjoyed it undisturbed. The roof is so low that it is impossible to stand upright inside, while the air is so thick that it is almost impossible to breathe. But one's hosts

regard none of these things, and would even shut up the tiny four-foot-high door if they had their way. Quickly and unconcernedly they dispose themselves to sleep again, and at last one falls asleep oneself to the sound of the heavy pattering of the rain, wondering what further vicissitudes await one before the dawn.

But there was one great drawback to that night in a Persian hut, which, as an honest narrator of facts, it is impossible to ignore. Everything else it was possible to smile at and enjoy, but there was one thing that no Englishman could pretend to regard with equanimity. It was charming to have seen something of wayside Persian hospitality, to have dropped suddenly into the midst of this tiny Persian village, and to have spent a night in its midst. So long as one had slept in the open it was well, though even there had come warnings of the near presence of all manner of creeping things. But inside that Persian hut the undesirable insect world ran riot at the welcome entrance of new blood to feed upon. The little things that jump jumped nimbly, and the little things that bite bit as they had surely never done before the whole night through.

CHAPTER VI

THE PASS OF THE OLD WOMAN

Eager to get into the open again after the cramped quarters in the hut, one is outside with the dawn. The rain has ceased, though the morning has broken curiously cold and grey for this land of perpetual sun. There is a damp mist in the air that gives the little group of huts an added touch of meanness and squalor. It is raw and chilly, almost like an English November morning, and the steaming hot tea which the old chief, who has proved so kind a host, has prepared is most welcome. The charvadar, completely himself again with the daylight, cheery and self-complaisant, with no shame for the terrors of the night before, soon has the mules loaded and ready for the start. The time has come to bid the old man farewell, and, knowing the Persian character, one ventures to hint at remuneration for his hospitality and kindness. But here for the only time across Persia, in this out-of-the-way village off the beaten track, money is quietly but firmly declined. 'When the master comes to his servant's house,' he says with simple dignity, 'then indeed is his servant honoured.' The whole village again turns out to see the start, watching with intense interest the loading of the mules, and one's own morning ablutions, which, necessarily

somewhat scanty, have perforce to be performed in full public view. The mules jog on at last up the slope that rises immediately ahead, and half regretfully one bids farewell to the little village that has treated one so hospitably, and once more takes the road.

Up behind the village on the slope of the hill lies a quaint little graveyard of tiny stones, some bearing inscriptions, some nameless. Scattered over the ground, they stand close-packed in irregular array. It is like some child's cemetery, infinitely pathetic and strangely more impressive than a graveyard of larger and more imposing stones. By some of them lie faded flowers but lately left there, while here and there one more important than the rest bears curious designs in crude and gaudy mosaic. There are many graveyards to be seen along this road from the Gulf to the Caspian, many of them covering immense areas, but none more impressive than this simple array of tiny stones on the hillside above the village of Dokinak.

From the crest of the slope a new landscape opens out to view. Below lies yet another of those vast valleys that separate the great kotals. This is the Dasht-i-Barm, the Valley of the Oaks. Scarcely any other trees grow here, the oak seeming to have ousted all rivals and to have taken possession of the entire valley. Again, it is not the English oak, high, leafy, and wide-spreading. Beside the giants of the New Forest these oaks would stand as pigmies, stunted and ungenerously designed. But in spite of this degeneracy they are more English than any other tree to be met with across the kotals, and there is something especially English about this valley

of the Dasht-i-Barm. Carpeted in the freshest of green, it is thickly sprinkled with gorgeous wild-flowers and dotted here and there with fields of rice and corn and *adas*. For hours, over undulating slopes and round the foot of innumerable little tree-clad knolls the pathway winds with never a sign of human life or habitation. Nothing could well be more peaceful or further from the haunts of men. The great cliffs tower a mile or so away on either side, as if they shielded this peaceful valley from observation, guarding it as a retreat of nature against the hand of man. The snow-clad peak, which had seemed so far away the day before, now looms up seemingly close at hand, while on other peaks, now disclosed to view afar off, still linger curious patches of snow and ice in the deep crevices where the sun as yet reaches but for a few hours every day.

At length after many a mile the valley changes. Almost suddenly it loses its freshness. The grass under foot ceases, and the road zigzags over an expanse of loose stones and broken ground. The oak trees still grow but more dwarfed and stunted, and so far apart that they afford no longer grateful shelter from the sun. The terrible glare which is the most trying part of the journey over the kotals beats upon one again with full force. The telegraph poles, creeping down the steep rock side almost perpendicularly from post to post, so precipitous is the descent, are sure sign that the beaten track is close at hand again, and soon the tinkling mule-bells herald the passing of a caravan not far ahead along the road.

By marching direct from Shapur we have escaped the steep ascent and descent of the Kotal-i-Dokhter, the Pass of the Maiden, that towers up above us to the right. It is a steep and difficult pass, and how it came to be known by so picturesque and gentle a name it is difficult to guess. Stern, frowning, and inhospitable, nothing could well be more unmaidenly. It can only be supposed that it got its name from its position next to the still higher and more rugged pass that lies on the other side of the Dasht-i-Barm. This is the Kotal-i-Pirizan, the Pass of the Old Woman, and it is presumably its immediate vicinity to this that has given the smaller one the name of its Daughter. Turning to the left, on joining the main track, the first ascent of the Pass of the Old Woman is begun. Its summit is some seven thousand five hundred feet above sea level, and from where we stand the path rises three thousand feet in a four and a half miles' climb. It is a most heart-breaking ascent. The broken stony road winds and twists with unvarying monotony, surmounting eminence after eminence and always upwards. The sun is high overhead, and the glare of the rocks, bleached almost dead white, is blinding. For some distance a forest of stunted trees continues to grow, forcing a foothold on this most unpromising of soils, affording, however, but little protection from the sun.

This road seems a crowded thoroughfare after the silence and desertion of the valleys of the day before. Caravan after caravan is on the downward way from Shiraz. The tinkling of the mule-bells is almost constant, the coming caravan above answering

faintly to that which has already passed on far below into the valley. Once a Persian horseman passes by, a picturesque figure, his horse a fiery little stallion gay with silver harness and red cloth martingale. He rides down as unconcernedly as if he rode the level streets of Shiraz, his gallant little steed stepping out fearlessly with firmness and precision. On our own mules, however, the steepness of the upward road tells heavily. The loads that they have borne so lightly hitherto now seem to weigh them down, and though they still struggle on bravely beneath them it is no easy task. Every hundred feet or so they are forced to come to a stand, panting with heads hung low and every sign of distress. Surely no caravanserai along all the route is so eagerly desired as that which is still invisible further on. The great frowning rocks seem to stretch up interminably. At the slow pace at which the caravan is forced to travel one makes no apparent impression on their tremendous height. Even when looking back, the valley lies far below. The same towering expanse of rock seems to rise above, stretched like a barrier in the path to keep the heart of Persia inviolate against approach.

It is one of the finest caravanserais in all Persia that at last offers its hospitality. Built of stone and marble, it was erected by Shah Abbas in the seventeenth century, when from his capital at Ispahan he raised Persia to its greatest height of military glory in modern times. It stands on a level platform halfway up the side of the kotal, perched like an eerie on the rocky slope. The freshness and purity of the air in itself is an exquisite joy. There is something in

it so keen and invigorating that, as one drinks it in after the heat and toil of the road, makes it almost intoxicating. At one's feet lies spread a marvellous panorama, a world of mountains on every hand, the only opening the narrow valley of the Dasht-i-Barm far below, tree-studded, a glorious patch of green with flashes of the Shapur River winding here and there along its length. For the rest it is all rock and cliff, ridge on ridge extending as far as the eye can reach, the marvellous clearness of the air seeming to disclose the world to view to its utmost end. The various formations of the different ranges is itself a thing of wonder. One range running off into furthest space might have been turned out of some enormous mould, so even and regular are the peaks and deep crevices that score the slopes. Almost yellow, the colour of desert sand, its numberless ridges, are as smooth and bare as if they had been planed. Another range, behind the caravanserai, a continuation of the colossal mass of the Pirizan, looks on the other hand, as if it had been cast up but yesterday by some mighty convulsion of the earth beneath, its peaks jagged and irregular, a serrated line against the sky in every conceivable form of ruggedness and distortion. A line of hills further down, tree-clad and undulating, look like hillocks far below.

Within, the caravanserai is exceptionally full of wayfarers. In the open courtyard a dozen groups of mules feed contentedly as the sun sets. A last caravan descending the Pirizan, the bells of the mules heralding it afar off, enters but just before the darkness falls. There is the sound on every

side of preparations for the night. The wings of many pigeons stir the air as they flutter to and fro, coquetting along the parapets, their wings a flash of silver grey, their cooings making soft, low music. In almost every verandah a fire gleams out of the darkness, showing dimly the moving figures as they gather round the evening meal. Outside the night is cold, a glorious starlight night that makes the view as clear as day, illuminating it with yet a softer brilliance and adding new beauties to its grandeur, subduing the glare of noonday to a deep and luminous restfulness and repose.

Again next morning, astir with the travellers of the caravanserai, which is before the dawn, the fifth day's march has soon begun. The sun has scarcely risen above the eastern cliffs and it is bitterly cold. Even the exertion of the climb, which is all on foot, is welcome after the chill of the great stone caravanserai. The longer half of the kotal has still to be surmounted. Up, up, up the road winds until the rest-house at Mian Kotal, with its tiny turrets and grass-grown roofs, looks like a doll's house far below. A long line of mules, climbing slowly but surely down, looks like a string of ants. The whole hillside resembles the bed of some dry torrent, strewn with huge boulders, bleached a blinding white in the sun, up which a narrow track has been worn, not to a semblance of smoothness, but to one degree less of roughness, by the feet of the countless mules who have passed this way. Close by, to the right as one nears the top, are long stretches of tree-clad slopes, fresh and green against the background of the precipitous cliffs that overhang them. From the

summit, seven thousand five hundred feet above the sea, there is the most extensive view to be obtained along all this route over the kotals. Across the wide expanse of many mountains the eye travels away to the plains beyond, embracing in one glance the whole length of the route to Bushire along which the caravan has so slowly made its way.

Of the road that lies ahead to the north there is little to be seen from the summit of the Pirizan. It lies hidden beneath a wealth of trees and behind a wall of cliff that blocks the view. It is not long, however, before the scene opens out, a scene as different from that on the southern side as could well be imagined. Instead of the steep descent of the Pirizan facing the scarcely less forbidding Kotal-i-Dokhter, there lies a fertile smiling plain, some eight miles long by three miles broad, shut in by mountains on every hand. This little valley seems as if Nature had planned it, where she might run riot in her softer moods to make up for the thousand miles of barrenness where she can no longer work her spell. It is known as the Dasht-i-Arjin, the Plain of the Wild Almond, which here grows in rich luxuriant fields beside the margin of an enormous lake that lies at the foot of the southern hills. From the surrounding heights, many of which still retain deep down their caps of snow, falls many a rushing torrent, a gleaming flash of crystal against the sombre background of the rocks. The waters of the lake itself are extraordinarily pure and clear, half in shadow as they reflect, as in a mirror, the outlines of the cliffs that rise above them, and half in brilliant sunlight, one vast expanse of dazzling radiance. Far off to the left lies the village

of Dasht-i-Arjin, nestling in a group of trees, beyond a hurrying stream that falling from the northern mountain flows down into the lake.

Of anything in the nature of Shikar the valley itself now seems deserted. Neither bird, beast, nor feathered fowl disturbs the plain or ruffles the smooth surface of the lake. Yet it was here on this northern descent of the Pirizan that Sir Oliver St. John was attacked by a lioness while on horseback in 1867, a most unprovoked assault from which he had a most miraculous escape. The maneless lion is still to be met with in the hills near by, though never on the main route in these days of many caravans; while antelope, ibex, and mountain sheep await the sportsman who has time to turn aside from the beaten track. They seldom now cross the traveller's path, and require to be sought with much diligence in their lairs away among the vast solitudes of hill and valley which offer them such magnificent protection.

Just before reaching the village of Dasht-i-Arjin a broad and shallow stream crosses the path, flowing clear and bright over the sandy track, beneath a clump of *chenars*, their fresh green leaves a glorious patch of shade after the treeless tramp across the plain. Sheltered beneath them is a small mosque-like building which is regarded with great veneration by every follower of the Prophet who passes by, for within it is a slab said to bear the mark of the foot-prints of the horse of Ali, son-in-law of Mahomet himself. Behind lies a cave in the rock, kept as a holy place, containing little tin sconces for votive offerings, one of the first outward symbols of worship met with along the road since leaving Bushire.

For some distance the path winds along the valley and then the ascent begins again. Though steep enough it is an easy climb compared with those that have gone before. The mules make light of it and the crest is soon surmounted. At its summit stands a ruined turret marking what was once the site of a guard-house, reminiscent of the days when this route was less frequented and less safe for travellers than it is to-day. Thence, after a last look back at the smiling Plain of the Wiid Almond, we follow a steep and stony road downhill. On either side the slopes are covered with low scrub and dwarf trees, the wild hyacinths and gorgeous red lilies growing in profusion beneath their shade. Further on is the range known as the Sineh Sufid, the White Breast, white with the stones that the sun has bleached, and from there again the road descends, still stony and precipitous, to the Kara Aghach, the Black Tree River. Crossing it by a fine stone bridge of many arches, three miles further on brings us to the caravanserai of Khana Zinian. Both bridge and rest-house were built by the Mushir-el-Mulk, that Vizier of the Governor of Fars who some half a century ago executed so many works of public utility in the province. The caravanserai is a fine square building, clean and with an upper story over the porch. Along the parapet a solitary figure paces to and fro like a sentry, lending to the building a still more military and fort-like air. The village lies close beyond, a quaint huddled group of huts that seem all jumbled into one long rambling building ending in the stone fort, solid and well built, of the head man of the neighbourhood. All round the land

is well cultivated and thick with the young corn, which is literally ablaze with wild flowers. To-morrow is the last stage into Shiraz, and after six days on the march, the far-famed joys of the much sung city make strong appeal.

The charvadar is particularly jubilant on the following morning, doubtless at the thought of the rest and ease that now lie only twenty-five miles off. He has shown marvellous powers of strength and endurance on the road. Every step of the way from Bushire he has tramped on foot, always cheery and willing, save only on that one occasion when night fell and found the caravan homeless in the Shapur valley. Now the worst of the road is over. The kotals are left behind at last, and the final stage that remains is by far the easiest of all. Only one long stretch of undulating country lies between Khana Zinian and the plain on which Shiraz stands.

Early as it is, we are the last to leave the caravanserai. At the outset the baggage has given trouble. Most of the straps from much rough usage have long since broken, and the supply of rope is running short. The holdalls and the Gladstone bags show many signs of wear and tear, and there is much doubt whether they will hold together till the end of the road, not a fifth of which has yet been covered. However, 'Inshallah' has long since become familiar as the only word for all occasions, and we are off at last, out under the arched gateway of the caravanserai and across a roughly built bridge into the village. The villagers are already grouped beside the road taking their ease, the inevitable kalyan passing from hand to hand in spite of the early hour. The Persian

peasant always seems to be at leisure. He has learned the art of taking life easily at all times, and the severest labour he ever undertakes appears to be to drive his cattle out to pasture and call them in at evening. It is difficult to imagine him ploughing and reaping, as he must sometimes do, in the fields that lie beyond the village.

The road at first winds along a narrow stony track, above which rises the steep face of the cliff, while below, a deep drop down, lies the gorge through which the river flows. So narrow is the track at times that the laden mules can scarcely pass and the charvadar runs ahead, as the path winds, to see that the road is clear. Then comes a long bare stretch of stony road, hot and monotonous, relieved only by the glorious view of the mountains on either side. Away to the left they are magnificent in outline, formed as if by the hand of man in fantastic and grotesque design. Crowning one eminence is what looks like some magnificent mediæval fortress, turreted and battlemented, fixed impregnable against attack on its lofty height.

Further on, less rugged and grand in contrast, they take on weird and curious patterns on their slopes. Here every colour of the rainbow seems to have been painted in layer on layer on the hill-side, down which the moisture has run in sweeping courses, forming enormous curves and patterns, coloured by the salt within the soil, like some strange crayon picture or kaleidoscope. The path runs in and out, between and over, and around and along successions of low hilly eminences in the valley, but always gradually descending to the Shiraz plain.

It is a long road, stiflingly hot in the hollows, but with a cooling breeze along the heights. So on at last across the river by a solid stone bridge one comes to Chenar Rahdar, the last caravanserai on the road, eight miles from Shiraz.

There is little of the famous city to be seen as one approaches. A wealth of trees in many gardens shuts it altogether out of view save for its domes and minarets just visible above the green. It is a wide straight road after leaving Chenar Rahdar, rough but level, the first stretch of road since leaving the Gulf that might conceivably be possible for a carriage. The first near glimpse of Shiraz is of numerous gardens that occupy its suburbs, lining the approach on either side. But little even of them is to be seen save the tops of the chenar and cypress trees with which they are all thickly planted, so carefully are they inclosed within high mud-walls. Truly is Shiraz the city of the cypress. In every garden it occupies chief place, its rich dark colouring showing up the delicate green of the *chenar* and *beed* which are already in the first bloom of spring.

It is sad that the first impression as one enters Shiraz should be of the air of neglect that hovers over it. Many of the walls that inclose the gardens are broken, disclosing nature grown rampant within, gates hanging hingeless, and the approaches rough and unkempt. The Shirazi cares little for his roads. He entirely sacrifices them, here at least, to his desire to irrigate his fields and gardens. It is of little moment that in doing so he makes the road for the time being into a pond or swamp. So long as he can guide the water into the innumerable channels that run along the sides of the roads and constantly

A PERSIAN GUY FAWKES OUTSIDE SHIRAZ.

cross them he is happy, and the wayfarer must put up with whatever inconvenience it entails.

It is a curious fact that the first sight one comes across in Shiraz should be an excellent counterpart of a real live English Guy Fawkes. Yet such, as it happens, forms the centre of one's first street-scene in the outskirts of the city. Outside a little mosque a group of men and boys have gathered round a typically English Guy Fawkes, and it stands there against a long low wall for all the world like a fifth of November figure; and inquiry elicits the fact that it is made with much the same intent. It represents Omar, who slew Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, the bystanders inform one; and every year on the anniversary of the occurrence the Shiahs, who revere the latter as the Prophet's true successor, burn his murderer in effigy. It is an unexpected scene. The central figure, a thing of rags, is the same. The fun and enjoyment of the boys is the same. The cheeriness and general good humour of the bystanders differs but little from the English counterpart. But there the similarity ends. The little mosque, the long low mud-wall, the figures and costumes of the actors in the scene, all are strange. Yet utterly different as were the occurrences that gave rise to the observances, one feels strangely that the human nature that prompted them and fostered them through long periods of time is the same, and that this little scene, disclosed by chance, has brought one more in touch with Persian life and character than much talk and many arguments could possibly have done. And so with this unforeseen train of thought uppermost in one's mind one enters Shiraz.

CHAPTER VII

SHIRAZ

This is the most fascinating city in the East. It is not that it contains within its walls some wonder of the world to give it claim to write its name upon the roll of great illustrious cities; it is not that it enshrines some special thing of beauty to draw the eyes of all men unto it. Its history, interesting as it is, is far less absorbing than that of many another Oriental city. It is not the modern Shirazi himself who by his learning or his charm constitutes its fascination. It is only a half-ruined Persian city, with narrow, ill-paved streets, its houses with jealous care screened by high walls against the public gaze; a city long since bereft of whatever political importance it may once have had and fallen back to the sleepy level of a provincial capital, where once it had been the centre of life and interest of an empire. It is altogether a city of the past, with little present and less hope of a future to colour its horizon.

Yet write of it what one may, it has a fascination that no other city in the East can rival. It is the city of Sadi and Hafiz, of poetry and romance, of blue domes and golden minarets, of many gardens of dark cypresses and verdant *chenars*, of roses and

cherry blossom, of shade and running water, the city of the Bagh-i-Jehan-nema, the Garden That Displays the World, and the Reshk-i-Behesht, the Envy of Heaven, wherein even the nightingale sings with an added note of joy and wonder. To Sadi, one of the greatest travellers of his time, Shiraz was always the best loved city, 'the city that turns aside the heart of the traveller even from his native land.' Almost every other writer who has passed this way has sung its praises. Even the fertile pen of Sir Thomas Herbert, the inimitable knight who accompanied the Embassy of Charles the First, it spurred to new flights of enthusiasm: 'Here art magick was first hatched,' he writes, 'here Nimrod (after Babell's confusion) lived and was buried. Here Cyrus (the most excelled of heathen princes) was borne, and (all but his head) intombed. Here the great Macedonian glutted his Ambition and Bacchism. Here the first Sybilla sang our Saviour's incarnation. Hence the Magi are thought to have set forth towards Bethleem and here a series of two hundred kings have swayed their sceptres.' It is all like some wonderful dream of the East made real. The Persian poets, with all their seeming extravagance and wealth of imagery, spoke true. In Shiraz there are many individual things of interest, but at first, caught in its all-engrossing spell, one is impatient of mere sight seeing, content to wander among its far-famed gardens, beneath the vaulted roofs of its bazaars or in and out among the courtyards and palaces of its bygone days, imbibing something of the very atmosphere of the place itself, which is content and restfulness and joy.

Yet its atmosphere was by no means always one

of peace. Shiraz has seen stormy days and suffered all the vicissitudes of an Eastern city. Of its first beginnings it is impossible to speak with certainty. One Mahomedan legend traces its origin back to the great-grandson of Noah. Another, less ambitious, ascribes its foundation to Mahomed, son of Yusuf Zekfi, as late as A.D. 694, though there are evidences that a city occupied this site centuries earlier in the days of the Achæmenian and Sassanian kings. It is the old story of the East. Here and there a name survives, surrounded by a vague halo of romance or associated with some one great deed, and nothing else remains. But even in historic times the city has seen the passing of many kings and many dynasties. Here in this far-off province of Fars, as the empire of the early Kaliphs draws to its close, there came the opportunity that the strong man of the time was not slow to seize. Men of no birth, with no claim to empire but the magnificent force of their own personality, thrust their way to the front, men such as Yakub-bin-Leith, the coppersmith, or the great family of Al-i-Bujah, founded by a fisherman, or the long line of Turkish rulers who held sway as semi-independent viceroys of the Kaliphs for well nigh a century. Then in the middle of the twelfth century arose Sunkur-ibn-Modud, chief of a Turkoman tribe, who fought his way to sovereignty. His successor, Abubekr, wise in his day, bent before the storm when Jenghiz Khan, the all-conquering Moghul, appeared upon the scene, and acknowledging his overlordship took back the kingdom of Fars as a fief at his hands. In his days lived Sadi and the glory of Shiraz was great. Then

came the line of Mubariz-ed-din Mohamed, whose title was El Muzaffer, the Victorious, in whose day lived Hafiz, and Timur the Great came to Shiraz, the meeting of the poet and the conqueror forming one of the most interesting scenes in all the pageant of the city's history. Again, with unheroic political wisdom, the city submitted to a conqueror whom it knew it could not resist.

It is curious to witness how time and again the Shirazis bowed meekly before the storm when a hostile army swept down upon them. Sheltered on all sides by their natural defences and securely guarded on the south by the almost impregnable kotals, their semi-independence was seldom threatened, and war-like qualities were not the most cultivated in the gay and pleasure-loving city. So, fully conscious of their weakness from a military point of view, they judged it best to advance to meet the conqueror with an ode of welcome and all-dutiful submission. They recognised with true Oriental fatalism that it was necessary that one should rule and that many should obey; and that being so it really mattered very little who the actual ruler might be. Let those who wished to rule fight it out among themselves; the Shirazi was content to acclaim the victor. It is not an altogether edifying spectacle, and it did not always prevent the conqueror from wreaking senseless vengeance on the unoffending city itself. But it doubtless avoided much of the havoc that war would have caused, and it may be that the Shirazis were wise in their day and generation to submit to the inevitable and save from spoliation the city that they loved. For the shrewd

Shirazis knew that no conqueror would be content with his easy victory over Shiraz, and that when the great man had gone they would be left again to their own semi-independence, much as they were before his coming. Once, led by an ambitious viceroy, they tried rebellion, and they needed no further lesson. Shah Mansur, thinking that Timur was too far off and too much occupied with his world-wide schemes of conquest to pay heed to Shiraz, induced the pleasure-loving city to throw off its allegiance. But the vengeance of Timur was swift, and the Shirazis, no match for his trained veterans, were soon humbled in the dust, and the ambitious Shah Mansur slain at the first encounter. Then the wrath of the conqueror fell upon the beautiful city, and for many a day it lost its gaiety and beauty, and the sound of song and music was hushed within its walls.

In the fifteenth century, under a line of Turkoman rulers who established themselves when smaller men were scrambling for the dead Timur's empire, Shiraz arose once more to an even fuller tide of prosperity. In those days its outskirts are said to have been twenty miles in circumference, the walls of the city itself being seven miles round, while its inhabitants numbered no less than two hundred thousand. Later, when Persia became once more an empire, welded into something of unity under the Sefavi kings—the Grand Sophies, as the English writers of the time so quaintly styled them—Shiraz lost much of its importance, sinking to the position of a provincial capital. Even so, under such governors as Imam Kuli Khan, who ruled as viceroy of the famous Shah Abbas, many of its former glories were revived. Shah Abbas himself at

Ispahan was not surrounded by greater state or a more brilliant court than his viceroy in the southern city, which itself had so far more beautiful a setting.

The later history of the city is, if possible, even fuller of vicissitudes. A terrible inundation in 1688 practically swept the older city out of existence, while the Afghans, turning to their own advantage the anarchy that followed on the death of Nadir Shah, did not spare the Shirazis in their wild career of lust and plunder. Yet, even from this its darkest hour, the famous city, with seemingly unconquerable vitality, was destined to arise again to something of its former beauty. It seemed as if nothing could finally destroy this city as so many other Eastern cities have been destroyed, as if nature had intended that it should be a thing of joy for ever. Under the guiding hand of its greatest viceroy in the middle of the eighteenth century, it sprang up in a few short years to be the greatest and most beautiful city in Persia. The memory of Kerim Khan Zend is still fragrant in the Shiraz of to-day. Almost all that there is of beauty within it now may be traced to his fostering care. From 1751 to 1779 he ruled the city, nominally as viceroy, in reality as sovereign of all Southern Persia. It was he who moved the capital from Ispahan, which had suffered so cruelly at the hands of the Afghans in 1722, even more cruelly than Shiraz itself. Rebuilding the stone walls of the southern city, he made them ten feet thick and raised them to a height of twenty-eight feet. It was to be a city such as it had never been before—this city of a strong man's love—encircled without for defence against the world, a thing of joy and beauty within. In the

heart of it lay the citadel, wherein in the *talar* of the palace he placed that stately monument of exquisite grace, the Takht-i-Marmor, the wonderful throne of pure Yezd marble that now stands in the Shah's palace at Teheran. It was he, too, who cast the great iron gun, known as the Tup-i-Murvarid, the Cannon of Pearls, that has also been robbed from the southern city and now forms one of the most conspicuous features of the Meidan-i-Shah in the modern capital. Mosques and madrassehs rose rapidly under his wise and peaceful rule, while his care for the more material prosperity of his people found evidence in the magnificent bazaar, the finest in all Persia, with its vaulted roof and miles of stalls, that grew to his design. Never in all its history was Shiraz more powerful and prosperous than in the days of Kerim Khan. Yet, like the majority of other things in Persia, its restored prosperity lacked permanency. The firm hand of the great man removed, the SSirazis were as sheep without a shepherd. The Zend dynasty, effete and weakened even by their comparatively short period of rule, was falling before the rising power of the Kajars, a northern tribe which had long cherished a blood feud with the ruling family. Their triumph finally came under the ferocious eunuch chieftain Aga Mahomed Khan, who put to the sword every surviving member of the Zend family. Burning with hatred against his dead rivals, Nadir Shah and Kerim Khan Zend, and harbouring a petty spite that he was great enough to have brushed aside, the new conqueror seemed possessed with a demoniacal desire to destroy all evidence of his rivals' work. Not only so, but he would

wreak a mean vengeance on those rivals' bodies, since the rivals themselves were dead and beyond his reach. So the remains of the great Kerim Khan were dragged from their resting place at Shiraz, as were those of Nadir Shah from Meshed, and buried beneath the threshold of his palace in Teheran so that he might daily have the petty gratification of trampling their remains under foot at his going out and coming in. So Kerim Khan Zend sleeps no more in the city that he loved, but for all time his spirit will hover over it and his memory be enshrined within it.

At the hands of the same Aga Mahomed Khan, the first ruler of the present Kajar dynasty, Shiraz suffered many things. All the works of Kerim Khan must be obliterated, and the magnificent walls of stone with which he had encircled the city were destroyed, and the trench that he had drawn around it filled up. The Kajar selected Teheran as the site of his new capital, and to it the dynasty that he founded has ever since remained faithful. But Shiraz, as the capital of the important province of Fars, could not be wholly ignored, and Aga Mahomed Khan sent his nephew Fath Ali Shah to reside there as his viceroy, and ever since, until recent political events have upset the even tenor of Persian ways, it has been reserved as an appointment for one of the near relatives of the Shah. The last Prince Governor of Shiraz was Moayyid-ud-Dowlah, cousin of the late Shah and nephew of Nasr-ud-din.

There was one last catastrophe—perhaps the greatest of all—that awaited the much tried city. It fell in the middle of the last century, obliterating

much even of that which had escaped the hands of the revengeful Kajar. In 1855 one of the severest earthquakes of modern times in the East overtook the city, levelling, it is said, more than half of it in the dust, destroying some ten thousand of its citizens in its fall. Since then no ruler has arisen to rebuild and beautify the famous city, and it still wears an air of desolation and neglect, which, though strange to the Western eye, doubtless adds something to its charm.

The flag that flies over the British Consulate is a welcome sight after seven days on the march in a strange land. Surrounded by a high wall, outside the city proper, there is nothing visible from the road save the flag above the gateway and the disreputable Persian guard, furnished by the Persian Government, on duty in the open doorway. Behind, in the midst of a garden gay with English flowers, lies the Consulate itself, a long, low, one-storied building with broad verandah fronting it. After the long march over the kotals, the English comforts that await one in it are appreciated as they have seldom been before. Of the kindness and hospitality met with under the shadow of the British flag in Shiraz it is impossible to speak too gratefully. They helped much to make the famous city the pleasant memory that it will always be.

The first visit is to his Highness the Prince-Governor, who had graciously granted us an audience for the following morning. The frock-coat, carefully brought for occasions such as these, is produced and donned, much the worse for its long sojourn in its cramped quarters in the Gladstone bag. No Persian

would ever appear without something in the way of a skirt on an occasion of ceremony, and a frock-coat is *de rigueur* for a European appearing before any Persian of position. There are few carriages in Shiraz, owing to the roughness of the roads, which are almost impossible for driving, and therefore, in spite of the unsuitable attire, it is necessary to ride. Setting out on horseback with the British Consul, two sowars of the Poona Horse accompanying us as escort, we pass along the broad, uneven road that leads from the Consulate to the city. Entering by the narrow gateway and passing through narrow rough paved alleys, we come to the great Meidan, a wide stretch of open ground, bare of tree or ornament. On the one side of it is the Ark or Citadel within which lies the palace of the Prince-Governor, and, dismounting outside, we enter through a high arched gateway. Here we are received by an official, resplendent in blue and gold, with long gold-headed wand and chain of office. Around the gateway and all about the Meidan are many groups of loungers, idly talking and gossiping, with apparently no care or business in the world. Many of them are moulvis and vakils, doubtless waiting with petitions or cases to bring before the Governor's courts that are held within the Citadel; but, if so, there is none of the keenness and interest to be found in the precincts of an Indian law court. Within the gateway, in the two courts through which we pass, it is the same: group after group of idlers, the typical hangers-on of an Eastern court. The second courtyard is bright with flowers, all save the flower beds being stone-flagged, with narrow channels, along which a constant

stream of water flows, a large tank of deliciously cool, fresh-looking water occupying all one side.

In this courtyard is a small round building covered with mosaics which give one a curious first impression of Persian art. The scenes depicted are most quaintly executed, the hunting scenes being the most remarkable of all. The designer seems to have cared little to depict things as they are, and to have coloured men, animals, and things in general entirely at his own sweet will. The pink and green horses and blue dogs are only a few among the many brilliant touches whose strangeness is almost lost in the riot of colour of the whole. Peeping within the building, a delightfully Persian scene meets the eye. It is absolutely bare of furniture, and seated on the ground in a large circle some twenty men are partaking of the morning meal. Cross-legged they sit with all a Persian's ease in that most un-Western attitude, their plates on the ground before them piled high with *pilau*, two enormous dishes of the same, now half depleted, being placed in front of him who is evidently chief of the feast. Two white-robed attendants pass round inside the circle in front of the guests, bearing large brass trays crowded with little plates each containing some luscious condiment such as the Persian loves. It is quite the most tempting Eastern meal one saw in Persia. Everything is spotlessly clean, from the guests themselves and those who serve to the dazzling whiteness of the rice of the *pilau* and the delicious adjuncts to it that fill the trays. At our appearance an eager invitation to join the meal is sent to us, but a reminder that the Prince-

Governor awaits us prevents our accepting their hospitality.

On either side of the doorway that leads to his Highness's apartments stand two Cossacks, the finest soldiers in all Persia, splendid men from the north, tall and well built, with a military air that the ordinary Persian soldier knows nothing of. Within is the Cossack captain of the Prince's body-guard, resplendent in uniform and sheepskin busby. The entrance hall is small and narrow, seemingly as if the thickness of the walls left little space within. On one side hangs a heavy green curtain, and on this being raised by our guide we pass into the Prince-Governor's audience chamber. There is nothing striking about the room itself, and its lack of furniture robs it of distinction to Western eyes. There is nothing in it save the three chairs arranged for the audience and a small modern writing-table. The walls are hung with silk purdahs elaborately embroidered, and carelessly arranged on the marble floor are some half a dozen Persian rugs of exquisite design and workmanship. Besides, there is nothing to detract one's attention from the Prince-Governor, who rises to receive us as we enter. He is a quiet, dignified man of middle age and middle height, dressed in a perfectly cut grey frock-coat, the only difference between his dress and that of an Englishman being the brilliance of his green silk tie and the bright yellow uppers of his neat patent leather boots. On his head he wears the usual Persian fez. With true Persian suavity and ease of manner he bids us welcome, and the first few minutes of conversation are filled with the usual

Persian high-flown compliments. His Highness speaks no English, but fortunately the Consul talks Persian with almost as much ease and fluency as the Prince himself. One's own Persian, which served well enough along the road, when confronted by the choiceness and beauty of the Prince's and the Consul's speech, suddenly becomes aware that it is not the language of courts, and modestly withdraws itself. So the Consul interprets, though it is not difficult to understand the Prince-Governor, who speaks with a clearness and distinctness that lend new charm even to the Persian tongue. He is asking of the journey over the kotals and trusting that the stranger has met with nothing but courtesy and respect in his province of Fars. Then, to entertain the visitor, he tells of his experiences as England's guest at the coronation of King Edward the Seventh. The manufacturing cities of the north seem to have impressed him most, and Brighton, the London-by-the-Sea, whence, somehow, one cannot help suspecting that he brought back some of those gorgeous cups with 'A Present from Brighton' on them in gold letters—a suspicion confirmed later on in the Shah's own palace at Teheran. One cannot help feeling that England appealed to him like some new toy, very wonderful, very fascinating for the moment, but not a thing for constant use. He enjoyed it very much, but he was glad to get back to Persia. 'It was impossible to do as one wished in England,' he complains with a smile. 'There one always had to be on show, always at someone's beck and call.' Accustomed to do mostly

as he pleased, and to obey the whim of the moment, those fully occupied days, with every hour mapped out for him, must have been something of a trial to the Oriental in whom the love of ease is always uppermost. Then one ventures to ask his Highness his views on the present state of affairs in Persia, on the constitution so hastily granted by the late Shah, and on the Mejliss now sitting at Teheran. The Prince-Governor's volubility ceases suddenly. A shrug of the shoulders expresses half-amusement, half-contempt. 'Qui vivra verra' is all he at first vouchsafes. Then as tea and cigarettes are brought in he laughs softly. 'Do not the Shirazi delegates start to-day?' he asks, 'and has not the Mejliss representing all Persia sat without them many months? and do the Shirazi delegates represent Shiraz? They represent themselves,' he laughs as we rise to take our leave; 'they represent themselves and—none other.' Accompanying us out into the courtyard, the Prince-Governor good-naturedly submits to be photographed. He is all politeness and courtesy till the last, promising, as he finally bids us farewell, to send on letters ahead along the road to Ispahan, so that we may meet with no difficulty on the next stage of our journey.

Out in the great Meidan again the most interesting building lies on the northern side. Once the Diwan Khaneh, or audience chamber, of the palace of Kerim Khan, it has been put in these latter days to less exalted uses, and now shelters the Indo-European and Persian telegraph establishments. It has lost much of its charm in the change from the stately dignity of princely courts to the noise and

bustle of modern clerks and the click of many messages, but it is still one of the most beautiful buildings in Shiraz. Through a great arched gateway one passes on to a fine garden courtyard, its centre filled by a *hauz*, or tank, which mirrors the open chamber at the end where once stood the exquisite Takht-i-Marmor, the Marble Throne, a thing so beautiful that even the senseless rage of Aga Mahomed Khan was stayed at sight of it; and although it was his hated rival's proudest handiwork, he spared it, carrying it—one wonders how—away to his palace at Teheran. Made of pure white marble, it must have had a dazzling effect from the further side of the courtyard across the *hauz* as the heavy curtains that hid it were drawn back on some great day of audience, revealing its glittering whiteness surrounded by all the pride and glory of the court of Kerim Khan.

Outside we mount again and ride into the bazaar. The word 'bazaar' used in the Persian sense conveys altogether a wrong impression to the English mind. Even between the Indian and the Persian bazaar there is a great difference. In India the word is used vaguely to denote the centre of the native quarter of the town where shopkeepers most congregate. In Persia the bazaar corresponds much more nearly to the market place in some English country town. It is usually one enormous building, roofed in, consisting of long avenues with stalls on either side. The Bazaar-i-Vekil in Shiraz is the finest in all Persia, and remains perhaps the most useful and enduring monument of the work of Kerim Khan. For five hundred yards the longest avenue extends, the arched

roof overhead, built of yellow bricks, keeping the crowded thoroughfare below cool even in the heat of the day. Half-way down the avenue, the arched roof opens out into a large circular dome beneath which stands a cistern, on a platform which is the meeting-place of many idlers gathered together to buy and sell or for much gossip. On either side at right angles extends another avenue, at the ends of which are caravanserais where men and beasts who have come from a distance may take a well-earned rest. It looks impossible to ride down the avenue, crowded as it is with men, women, and children, and strings of mules and donkeys laden with huge burdens that almost sweep the wayfarers off their feet as they brush by. Yet the horses quite unconcerned thread their way through, the people making no comment and taking but the smallest notice. All is life and movement. Here for a time the easy-going Shirazi seems to awake to something of the realities of life, and bargains avariciously to the last fraction of a kran to save his pocket. A constant stream of those who buy and sell pass up and down. Unlike the English fashion, all the men of a trade forgather, their shops in rows side by side, exhibiting absolutely identical wares. As the prices seem to vary little, it is difficult to see how so many of them manage to thrive, but evidently the demand is sufficient to keep them all going.

Among the large number of European and foreign made goods in the bazaars there are not many articles to be found of local manufacture. The enamelled bowls and stems of the much used kalyan or hubble-bubble pipes are the most noticeable productions.

There is also some repoussé silver work to be seen, and a species of mosaic work in wood or ivory, most commonly in the form of pen-cases and snuff-boxes. From the district round came many forms of preserved fruits, with almonds and raisins in abundance, some opium, raw cotton, the famous Shiraz wine, and the much prized local *tumbaku*, which commands so great a sale in Shiraz that there is little left to export.

Of imported goods, however, there is no lack, and here are to be found many of the things that the strings of mules, passed on the kotals, have brought up from the Gulf, received there from Bombay and the Further East. The high conical blocks of lump sugar, wrapped in brown paper, from Marseilles, catch the eye everywhere, with Manchester cotton and German woollen goods, French and German cutlery and cheap crockery, Dutch candles and tea from China. Indian tea is to be had, but it has as yet none of the popularity of that from China, to which the conservative Persian has been so long accustomed.

It is strange that the same city which is famed throughout Persia for its bazaar, where all that is noisy and worldly most congregates, should be still more famous for its exquisite gardens, those haunts of quietness and peace which its own poets have made so celebrated in song. They are something of a surprise at first, these same gardens, to the English eye. Here there is no wide expanse of exquisite lawn, no well-filled flower beds with trim kept paths and pleasaunces. Shut in by high mud-walls there is nothing visible from without save the trees that

tower above them. Within there is the summer house, often a palatial building, elaborately coloured and adorned with wide open verandahs, where the Shirazi can bask in the sun, and the light, and the air that he loves. Leading from the front of it is a long tiled pathway extending to the far end of the garden, with little streams of crystal-clear water on either side of it, running often over brilliantly coloured tiles. On either side again beyond rise rows of cypresses, willows, poplars, elms, and sycamores that serve as fitting background to the mass of blossom on the fruit and rose trees that fill the remaining space. All is primness and precision, long vistas, straight lines, and regularity. The Shirazi, knowing Nature when left untrammelled in her wildest and most luxuriant moods, seems to have taken keen delight in forcing her to conform to his own strict lines of beauty. But in most of the gardens of Shiraz time has given Nature her revenge. Underneath lie the trim set lines on which man ordained that she should run, but covering them, hiding them often altogether out of sight, she has woven a network of wild luxuriance, triumphing over and obliterating the handiwork of man. For as over everything else in Shiraz there is an air of neglect over almost every one of her gardens, beautiful as they still remain. In many of them, over the trim flagged pathway, the grass grows rampant, and brambles crowd thick under the cypresses and elms; the watercourses are broken and the blue tiles missing, while the summer houses wear a forlorn air as if their owners had long since passed away and none had come to claim them. Flowers are but little

cultivated. Rest and shade, and always the sound of running water, are all that a Persian asks.

Shiraz is full of such gardens as these. The Dilkusha Bagh, the Garden of Heart's Desire, is perhaps the most perfect, the one to be looked back upon as most typical of the city's charm. It was in the heat of the day that we reached it, wearied with many sights and tired with the noise and clamour of the great bazaar. In the verandah of the summer house, looking out over the garden down the cool stone-flagged path and the long vista of the cypress trees, tiffin lay spread, prepared with all a Persian servant's skill, a jug of the famous wine of Shiraz full to the brim. It is an excellent wine, this wine of Shiraz, when at its best—as impossible to describe as the charm of the city itself. Tested at first in Shiraz, it had disappointed. Either it had not stood the journey over the kotals well or had been of an inferior brew, for it must be confessed that the first impression was of bad sherry. But quaffed in the Garden of Heart's Desire under the shade of the cypress, lulled by the ceaseless lapping of the rills that hurry by in the channels at our feet, it is a drink of the gods—a drink indeed sufficient to beguile even the Mussalman from the strict observance of his Koran. With rest and shade, and the sound of running water, the clear yellow wine to quaff, and nothing to break in upon one's peace, one understands more clearly something of the Shirazi's easy-going, peaceful, unambitious nature. The spirit of the place is not ambition, not restlessness, not enthusiasm. These things the true Shirazi knows not. Bred in the environment of Shiraz he has

imbibed its spirit, the spirit of the moment, of rest and pleasure, the comfortable spirit of 'Inshallah,' 'If God wills.' Lulled by the very atmosphere of the place to ease and happiness, why struggle? What God wills will be! God is great!

To the north of the city, backed by the northern hills, lies the most imposing garden of all, the Bagh-i-Takt, the Garden of the Throne. Owing its origin to Aga Mahomed Khan, the first of the Kajars, it is full of pretension. It is no mere summer house here, but a veritable palace that towers up, overlooking the city, raised on seven terraces down which run watercourses, like cascades, falling into the long tank at the foot which is known as the Darriacheh, the Little Sea. Wilder, with a greater air of neglect, is the Bagh-i-Jehan-nema, the Garden that Displays the World, laid out by Kerim Khan, in whose time it was known by the more prosaic title of the Bagh-i-Vekil, the Regent's Garden. The pavilion, built later by Fath Ali Shah, was formerly assigned as a place of residence to distinguished Europeans who passed this way, and here during his visit in 1821 died C. J. Rich, the British Resident at Baghdad, his body finding a permanent resting place within the garden. The cemetery in which Europeans, who have died at Shiraz in later years, have been interred lies not far off at the foot of the hills, a sad little place of bare forgotten graves.

The Bagh-i-No, the New Garden, still retains its name with true Oriental conservatism, though it is now some hundred years since it first acquired that appellation. Laid out by the son of Fath Ali Shah, a portion of it is now occupied by the local manager

of the Bank of Persia. Gay with flowers it combines something of the charm of a Persian with that of an English garden. There is many another to visit, each one so like the last, yet each with its own peculiar charm, calling to one to rest by the road of life and to leave the cares of the world without its gates. The Reshk-i-Behesht, the Garden of the Envy of Heaven. and the Bagh-i-Iram are but two among many others that tempt one to linger within their grateful shade.

There is one other official visit to be paid. The Khawam-ul-Mulk is the Deputy Governor of Shiraz, the all-powerful minister of the Prince-Governor. A great local potentate of almost princely rank, he is the power behind the Throne and the most influential man in Shiraz. His palace lies in the heart of the city behind a maze of winding streets, stone-paved and narrow, with nothing but blank walls on either side. The Khawam-ul-Mulk has all the charm of manner of the Prince-Governor, though not his courtly presence. He is a considerably older man and the weight of years has told heavily upon him. It is evident that the political situation is taken far more seriously by him than by the Prince-Governor, and it may be that he foresaw even then something of the tragic end that lay in wait for him at the assassin's hands. For the Khawam-ul-Mulk is one of those members of the ruling class in Persia who have already paid the death penalty, having been shot by one of the revolutionaries in his own palace at Shiraz, where a few months before he had given us audience.

Nothing could well be more unostentatious than

THE BAGH-I-IRAM, IN SHIRAZ.

these official receptions, or more unlike those paid by that delightful personage Sir Thomas Herbert in Shiraz nearly four hundred years ago. His description of his reception in company with Sir Dodmore Cotton, the Ambassador of Charles the First, and Sir Anthony and Sir Robert Sherley makes one's own visits seem tame in the extreme in comparison. 'Somewhat of Emangoly-Cawn, the great Duke and his Banquet,' writes this inimitable chronicler. 'This brave man is a Georgian by descent, a Mussulman by profession, a Time-server for preferment: is one of those four Tetrachs, that under Abbas rule the Empire: his Territories reach every way welnigh six hundred miles and afford him the Titles of Arck-Duke of Shiraz, Sultan of Lars, Lord of Ormuz, Prince of the Gulf of Persia and Iles there: the great Beglerbeg, commander of twelve Sultans, fifty thousand horse, slave to Shaw-Abbas, protector of Mussulmen, flower of courtesy, second in glory, Nutmeg of comfort and Rose of delight.' This great personage 'meant to display his radiance' and invited his visitors to a State banquet. 'My Lord Ambassador was seated on the left side of the state (you may note, if you please, that all Asia over, the left hand, as the sword hand, is most honourable), upon the other side sat the discontented Prince of Tartary: at my Lord's left hand was seated the Beglerbeg and next him the captive King of Ormuz. Next to the Tartar Prince sat Threbis-Cawn a disconsolate Prince of Georgia, a brave warrior, a constant Christian: opposite to the State Sir Robert seated himself: and with us were placed the two Princes of Ormuz and some Sultans. The rest of

the great banqueting room was filled with men of especial note, Sultans, rich Merchants and Cooselbashaes: young Ganimeds, arrayed in cloth of gold, went up and down with flagons of pure gold to pour out wine to such as nodded for it: upon the carpets were spread fine coloured pintado Table cloths, forty ells long: and broad thin pancakes fried one upon another served for trenchers, near which were scattered wooden spoons, whose handles were almost a yard long: the spoon itself so thick, so wide, as required a right spatious mouth for entertainment. The feast begins. It was compounded of a hundred sorts of peels and candied dried meats, as also of Dates, Peares, and Peaches curiously conserved, such I took best notice of (I mean as pleased me best) were Iaacks, Myrabolans, Duroylus, Pistachoes, Almonds, Apricocks, Quinces, Cherries, and the rest I leave to the confectioner to enquire after. It seems we are so infatuated with our banquet and wine that the Duke is not taken notice of, pray pardon: he is not yet come, that when our bellies are full, our eyes may have the better leisure to surveigh his greatnesse. The feast being ended the vulgar multitude strove to rend the sky with *Yough Ally-Whoddaw-Bashat*, i.e. Ally and God be thanked: the Eccho was a watchword to the ambitious Duke that he might enter: his way was made by thirty gallant young gentlemen vested in crimson Satten, their Tulipants were of silk and silver wreathed about with cheques of Gold, of Pearle, of Rubies, Turquoises and Emeralds: all of them were girded with rich swords and imbroydered scabbards: they had Hawks upon their fists, each hood valuing a hundred pound. To

these succeeded their Lord, the Arch-Duke of Shiraz: his coat was of blew satten richly imbroydered with silver, upon which he wore a Vest or Roab of great length, so glorious to the eye, so thick powdered with Orientall glittering Gemms as made the ground of it invisible, the price invaluable: his Turbant was of pure fine silke and gold, bestudded with pearle and Carbuncles: his scabbard was set all over with Rubies, Pearles and Emeralds: his Sandalls resembled the bespangled Firmament. To this Idoll all the people of his religion sacrificed a hundred Salams, bowing and knocking their cocks-combs against the ground: Sir Robert Sherley also salamed very formally and in a cup of pure gold drank his Grace's health, and then put it in his pocket: paying him home with this complement: That after so mean a person as himself had breathed in it, it was impiety to offer it him: the Duke accepts it as good coyne and perceiving our Ambassador very sad, darted him a smile, drunk his Master's health, bad him and his heartily welcome, and so went in againe: our Lord Ambassador scarce well pleased at the Duke's proud carriage, dissembled it: and after reciprocalle salaams or bendings departed.'

For twenty six days the worthy knight enjoyed the Duke's hospitality in Shiraz, and he has much more to say of its wonders and delights. On Lady Day in Lent he at last departed for Ispahan, and even then it was only with great reluctance that he bade the gay and festive city farewell. 'I cannot ride far,' he writes, lingering over his account of it, 'till I celebrate my vale dictum in this charistery.'

Why should our wits dispute where Eden stood?
If in the Earth, or Ayre, or if the Flood
Did spoyle the surface, thus we fell from thence!
And too much knowledge lost the residence.
Yet if that place remaine: for us to guesse
By outward attributes of happinesse
Why should thy Plaines (Shiraz) give place to those
Where fruitful Nyle and Ganges overflowes?
Thy curious prospect, lodges, soyle, the rich
Variety of pleasures that bewitch
Each gazing eye, would make the looker on
Think Paradise had no destruction,
Or else replanted there. . . .
Farewell, sweet place; for as from thee I went
My thoughts did runne on Adam's banishment.

Dar-el-Ilm, the Abode of Knowledge, is the proud official title of Shiraz. If to be full of syeds and moulvis, of madrassehs and mosques, can make a city deserve the name, Shiraz assuredly has claim to it. The Shirazis have always been notorious for an extravagant conceit of themselves, being fully endowed with a firm belief in their own and their city's superiority. But it is chiefly to Kerim Khan that modern Shiraz owes most of what remains of its buildings for the promotion of education and the exercise of religion, the finest among them being the Musjid-i-Vekil, the most beautiful mosque in Shiraz. There are only two old mosques, built before his day, that still survive. The oldest of all, the Musjid-i-Jama, according to tradition, was built by Amru-bin-Leith, dating back as far as A.D. 875. It is especially interesting as containing within its ruined walls a small stone building with towers of later date at the four corners, said to be a replica of

the famous Kaaba at Mecca. Bearing the date corresponding to A.D. 1450, this small building is known as the Khoda Khaneh, the House of God, and is held, in spite of its dilapidated condition, in special veneration. It would be astounding had one not already got to understand, dimly it is true, yet something of the Persian character, that they, a fanatical people, can still leave in a ruined state a building which they hold so sacred. The slightest desecration of the Khoda Khaneh would rouse a storm of violent fanaticism, yet not a single follower of the Prophet stretches out a hand to restore and beautify, and to make the House of God and the Prophet a fitting abode.

The Musjid-i-No, like the Bagh-i-No, has retained its name long after it has grown old, having been converted into a mosque, it is said, in A.D. 1226. There is a legend connected with it that tells how once it was the palace of the Atabeg sovereigns, and how in the days of one of them, by name Ali-bu-Said, his son fell ill and lay sick unto death. In despair the king consulted the mullahs. What was it that he valued most in life? they asked him. If he would that God should spare his son, he must offer unto God that which he valued most next to his son's life. Perchance God would accept that instead. So he offered his palace to be God's house, and on his son's recovery he adapted it to the requirements of a mosque. There is no dome, and it consists only of a flat-roofed cloister round a large open court, bearing striking evidence that it was not originally intended for its present purpose.

Behind the Musjid-i-No rises the largest dome in

Shiraz, that of the Shah Chiragh. Its elongated shape raises it high above the surrounding buildings, its brilliant blue and yellow mosaics flashing in the sunlight above the dark green cypresses that seem to close completely round it when viewed from the heights above the city. It contains beneath it, hidden from the prying eyes of the infidel behind a silver grating, the tomb of one of the sons of Imam Musa. Outside the city in the northern suburbs lies yet another famous mosque, that of Shah Mirza Hamza, whose four glittering minarets of gold are one of the most conspicuous landmarks in the city of to-day.

On the northern heights, overlooking the city on the bare hillside, is an enormous hollow in the rock, for which even tradition has apparently failed to find an origin, and which, regarded as something supernatural, has been named the Gahwareh-i-Dev, the Devil's Cradle. Not far off along the hillside is a remarkable well, known as the Chah-i-Ali Bunder, descending sheer down through the rock cliff to unfathomable depths. It is said that rope to the length of eighteen hundred feet has been let down without bottom being touched. How it was hewn down through the solid face of the rock no legend even has survived to tell. In former days women convicted of adultery—the crime in a woman without forgiveness in Persian eyes—were ruthlessly flung down it. Another well known as the Chah-i-Murtaza Ali is, on the other hand, regarded as sacred, and is still visited by pilgrims, who attach healing properties to its waters. A number of steps lead down to it, and a quaint little building, something in the form of a mosque, surrounded and half hidden by a clump

of trees, has been erected over it, wherein lives a hermit, old and white-haired, all in the style of some mediæval Persian legend. On this spot, according to tradition, there was once a fire altar of the Zoroastrians, and the sacredness of the well is due to the fact that its waters sprang up to quench the flames on the altar of the old faith and to herald in the supremacy of the faith of Islam.

But the greatest glory of Shiraz yet remains. It is the lives and writings of Sadi and Hafiz which have thrown the greatest glamour over the famous city, and in spite of the centuries that have passed their spirit is still strong within it to-day. Their bodies now lie enshrined in the city that they loved, and their graves, carefully tended in their peaceful enclosures beneath the shade of cypress and elm, are points of pilgrimage for every true Irani—the most fascinating spots in all Shiraz.

CHAPTER VIII

BY THE GRAVES OF SADI AND HAFIZ

Away across the plain, two miles north of the city, lies the grave of Sadi. It is the most restful spot in all Shiraz. Apart from the stir and noise of the city, the poet sleeps in the midst of a garden such as his soul loved, an oasis of freshness and life, a veritable rose-bower in the midst of the barren plain.

From without it looks much like one of the many gardens of Shiraz, but smaller, completely surrounded and shut in by high walls, above which nothing but the tall poplars and stately cypresses rise into view. Passing through a narrow doorway one might be in the very 'Gulistan,' Rose Garden, of Sadi itself. The open courtyard is paved with stone and gay with flowers that seem to bloom here with special luxuriance, beside the grave of him who in life so fully appreciated their every beauty. Above rise the giant poplars and dark cypresses, a mass of green that shelters the little building at the further end, beneath which the poet's remains were long since laid to rest.

In one corner of the courtyard the venerable old man who guards the Sadieh is holding school. In front of him sit half a dozen tiny scholars, writing with their quaint wooden pens on square cut plantain

leaves that serve for paper. They are copying laboriously a famous line of Sadi's, a copy of whose poems beautifully illuminated lies open on the old man's knees, and no line could well be more appropriate to this restful spot beside the beautiful city that Sadi loved.

If there is a Paradise on earth, it is this, it is this.

The chubby little hands grasp the pens and trace the words with grim determination, their cherub faces puckered with anxious effort. They surely form the quaintest school one is ever likely to see again. Their ages vary from four to seven, quaint little specimens of humanity, solemn, with all the solemnity of Oriental childhood. Large round dark eyes, 'moonfaced' as Sadi himself would have described them, fix the stranger with that look of mingled innocence and childish wisdom that seems to screen a deeper knowledge than that to which mere man has yet attained. The old man smiles as one looks down at them with interest. They are learning the wisdom of Sadi at the very feet of the great teacher, who still lives despite the centuries that have passed. It may be, if God wills, that one of them may follow in his steps and write his name beside the master's on the scroll of fame. Then taking off his quaint, horn-rimmed spectacles and reverently laying aside his copy of the master's works, the old man hastens to show the stranger into the holy of holies, wherein all that was mortal of the poet was laid to rest six centuries ago.

Raised above the level of the courtyard, it is a small, plain building to cover so great a shrine.

Whitewashed and spotlessly clean inside, there is no attempt at ornamentation or decoration. Its simple dignity and unpretentiousness are its most striking characteristics in a land where so much is ornate and ostentatious. On one side of the entrance are the living rooms of the mullah who guards the shrine. On the other, in the single room, there is nothing but the sarcophagus that covers the poet's grave. It is an oblong block of stone, some three feet high, the top of it covered with inscriptions in the Arabic character, quotations taken from Sadi's own writings. Therein all who pass this way are called on to pause and reflect upon the fleeting nature of human life and the eternal changelessness of God. Round the sarcophagus runs a screen of metal open work, guarding it from too familiar hands. Thrown reverently upon the slab lie a few new-gathered flowers, a spray of roses, and a twig of pure white cherry blossom, a touching tribute when one remembers that the poet has been dead more than six hundred years. Where else save in the land of few happenings and long memories are flowers still fragrant even on a national hero's grave after six hundred years ?

Sadi's life was full of adventure. Born at Shiraz in A.D. 1184, he enjoyed far more than the allotted span of life, dying, if recorded dates are to be believed, as late as A.D. 1291. Of his ancestry little is known with certainty. He is popularly supposed to have been descended from Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet ; and his father, whose name is given as Abdullah, is said to have held a minor post at Court. From the evidence of certain lines in the ' Bustan,'

Sadi seems to have lost his father at an early age. He writes :

> The grief of an orphan full well I can share,
> Since I tasted in childhood the orphan's despair.

Sadi was educated at the Nizamiah College at Baghdad, where he early showed his aptitude by winning a scholarship. His real name is given as Muslih-ud-din Abdullah, his pen name of Sadi having been adopted out of compliment to Sadi-bin-Zangi, Atabeg of Fars, who took him while still a youth under his protection. It was on leaving the college at Baghdad, where he doubtless acquired his skill in Arabic, that he went on his first pilgrimage to Mecca, which he was destined to visit again no less than thirteen times during his long life. He was undoubtedly the most travelled Persian of his day, if not the greatest traveller of any country in the thirteenth century. Besides his fourteen pilgrimages to Mecca, he visited places so far afield as Abyssinia, Egypt, Palestine, Asia Minor, Armenia, Afganistan, and India. From time to time we catch glimpses of him in his writings, 'addressing a few words by way of exhortation to a frigid assembly in the chief mosque of Heliopolis,' 'listening to an Arab amid a circle of jewellers at Bosra,' travelling through Arabia Petræa with a company of devout youths, or with the caravan making his way on pilgrimage to Hijaz. For thirty years—from 1226 to 1256—he gave full bent to his love of travelling, taking the ups and downs of the true wayfarer's life with equal enjoyment and amusement. 'I have wandered to various regions of the world,' he writes, 'and everywhere

have I mixed freely with the inhabitants. I have gathered something in each corner. I have gleaned an ear from every harvest.' There was no phase of life that Sadi did not come into close contact with, and it is to this fact that the remarkable catholicity and applicability of his writings to all times and to all countries is doubtless very largely due.

Palestine was the scene of Sadi's first matrimonial experiences. In the 'Gulistan' he relates the story of them in delightfully frank and amusing vein. 'Having become weary of the society of my friends at Damascus,' he writes, 'I set out for the wilderness of Jerusalem and associated with the brutes, until I was made prisoner by the Franks, who set me to work along with Jews at digging in the fosse of Tripolis, till one of the principal men of Aleppo, between whom and myself a former intimacy had subsisted, passed that way and recognised me and said, "What state is this, and how are you living?" I replied:

> From men, to mountain and to wild, I fled,
> Myself to heavenly converse to betake;
> Conjecture now my mind, that in a shed
> Of savages I must my dwelling make.

He took compassion on my state, and with ten dinars redeemed me from the bondage of the Franks and took me along with him to Aleppo. He had a daughter whom he united to me in marriage, with a portion of a hundred dinars. As time went on the bride turned out to be of a bad temper, quarrelsome, and unruly. She began to give the run to her tongue and to disturb my happiness. At length she gave vent to reproaches and said, "Art thou not he whom

THE TOMB OF SADI OUTSIDE SHIRAZ.

THE TOMB OF HAFIZ AT SHIRAZ.

my father purchased from the Franks' prison for ten dinars?" I replied, "Yes, he redeemed me for ten dinars and sold me into thy hands for a hundred."' It is perhaps not surprising after this unfortunate matrimonial experience in early life that his references to the fair sex are not as a rule complimentary. Yet so susceptible was he to the tender passion that he relates in one of his odes that he in five days nearly lost, through love, the character for wisdom and uprightness that he had carefully built up during fifty years. Later he married again while still on his travels at Sanaa, the capital of Yemen. Over this second matrimonial venture he has drawn the veil of silence; yet certain lines in his writings, such as 'Choose a fresh wife every spring, for the almanack of last year is good for nothing,' do not altogether imply that he had found domestic bliss.

Sadi was some seventy years old before he finally gave up his travels and withdrew to Shiraz to spend the long last years of his life in his much loved native city. These years were the years of his chief literary activity. In 1251 he published the 'Bustan,' the Garden of Perfumes, and the 'Gulistan,' the Rose Garden, followed a year later. The latter, his most famous work, is a collection of stories and anecdotes grouped under various heads. 'Mature consideration as to the arrangements of the book, ordering of the chapters, and conciseness' he writes in the preface, 'made me deem it expedient that this delicate garden and this densely wooded grove should, like Paradise, be divided into eight parts in order that it may become the less likely to fatigue.' 'The manners of Kings,' 'the Qualities of Dervishes,' 'The

Excellence of Contentment,' 'The Advantages of Taciturnity,' 'Love and Youth,' and 'Decrepitude and Old Age' are the headings of some of the chapters into which the 'Gulistan' is divided. The splendid catholicity of Sadi's writings, their universal human interest and broad toleration are remarkable in the bigoted and intolerant age in which he lived. There were few men of any country in the thirteenth century who wrote with such wide sympathy and charity, such large-heartedness and consideration for all mankind.

> All Adam's race are members of one frame,
> Since all, at first, from the same essence came.
> When by hard fortune one limb is oppressed
> The other members lose their wonted rest.
> If thou feel'st not for others' misery
> A son of Adam is no name for thee.

There is nothing of the Pharisee about Sadi. His simplicity and directness, his hatred of hypocrisy and cant, permeate all his writings. He can tell a story, too, with a moral at his own expense. 'I remember that in the time of my childhood,' he writes once, 'I was devout and in the habit of keeping vigils and eager to practise mortification and austerities. One night I sat up in attendance on my father and did not close my eyes the whole night, holding the precious Koran in my lap while the people around me slept. I said to my father, "Not one of these lifts up his head to pray; they are so profoundly asleep that you would say they were dead." He replied, "Life of my father! it were better if thou, too, wert asleep rather than that thou shouldst be backbiting other people."' His contempt for riches is constantly apparent in his pages. Great men

were ready to heap untold wealth upon this sweet singer, this 'nightingale of a hundred songs,' but Sadi loved freedom and the roving life of a dervish far better than anything that money could buy. When the chief minister of Hulaku Khan, the conqueror of Baghdad, sent him a present of fifty thousand dinars, he declined it for himself, but spent the whole of it on a rest-house for travellers on the outskirts of the city that he loved.

His freedom from form and conventions and his insistence on the value of an honest life as above every other consideration are again remarkable in the writings of an Eastern poet of his time and race:—

> Of what avail is frock, or rosary,
> Or clouted garment? Keep thyself but free
> From evil deed; it will not need for thee
> To wear the cap of felt; a dervish be
> In heart, and wear the cap of Tartary.

It is Sadi's ready wit and quickness at repartee that have done so much to endear him to his conversation-loving countrymen. His writings, terse and epigrammatic, tempt one to quote. The last story on the advantages of taciturnity is delightfully brief. A man with an extremely harsh voice was reading the Koran in a very loud tone, it runs. 'A sage passed by and asked, "What is thy monthly stipend?" He replied, "Nothing." "Wherefore then," said the sage, "dost thou give thyself this trouble?" He replied, "I read for the sake of God." "Then," said the sage, "for God's sake don't."'

Sadi, much as he wrote, was nevertheless a firm believer in the advantages of taciturnity.

Art silent? None can meddle with thee. When
Thou once hast spoken, thou must prove it then.

Or again: 'I was hesitating about a bargain for a house when a Jew said to me, "I am one of the old inhabitants of this quarter. Inquire of me the value of the house and purchase it, for it has no fault." I replied, "None except that thou livest near it."'

Throughout all his writings there runs a strain of invincible optimism. It is the large-minded tolerance of the man who has seen the world, the inveterate cheerfulness of one who has experienced the ups and downs of life, and who is content to take what comes:—

Sit not sad because that time a fitful aspect weareth;
Patience is most bitter, yet most sweet the fruit it beareth.

The joy of life is never wholly absent. Sadi, whose very name signified felicity, was in love with life, with his own beautiful city, its gardens, its summer houses, and its streams of running water. With true Oriental abandonment he lets himself revel in the joy of these things, forgetful of the past and the future, content to take each fleeting moment as it comes and enjoy it to the full.

To-morrow is not; yesterday is spent;
To-day, O Sadi, take thy heart's content.

Or, again, thrusting aside the presage of the coming years, determined to drain life's pleasures to the dregs while youth remains.

Count we not life's sober moments,
Coming years of change and chance;
In these hours of youth's glad springtime
I will join the Dervish dance.

I'll not heed those years advancing
Without joy, without romance.
Hence 'gainst all thy admonition
I must join the Dervish dance.

Yet behind these outbursts of enthusiasm, this joyous abandonment, there is always the more serious note. They are only the exuberant outpourings of a naturally joyous spirit; he is soon back again relating some quaint story with its obvious moral, or setting forth the virtues of altruism, even on the lowest ground of expediency, a strange mixture of piety and worldly wisdom.

Much good awaits us in this world to do,
And while we can let's do it, I and you.
On life's long path there must be thorns indeed:
Let's scatter roses for the feet that bleed.
So shall the needy bless the helper's name;
Who knows how soon he may require the same?

There is such an infinite variety in Sadi's writings that it is impossible to do full justice to them with a few stray quotations. They range over almost every subject under the sun, and on each the poet has something wise and generous and helpful to say, painting brilliant word pictures in telling epigrammatic phrase. How much both prose and poetry lose by translation only those who can read the original are able fully to appreciate. There is a proverb that each word of Sadi has seventy-two meanings, and often the whole point of a couplet depends on a fanciful play upon words that loses all meaning when translated into another language. Yet on the other hand, again, so great is the variety

of his writings, there are some exquisite sonnets that lend themselves admirably to translation into any language. There is none more typical of the delicate fancy and tender sympathy of the great poet than these charming lines whose memory we carry with us as we bid farewell to Sadi.

I saw some handfuls of the rose in bloom,
With bands of grass suspended from a dome.
I said, 'What means this worthless grass that it
Should in the rose's fairy circle sit?'
Then wept the grass and said, 'Be still! and know
The kind their old associates ne'er forgo.
Mine is no beauty here or fragrance—true,
But in the garden of the Lord I grew.'

Of Hafiz there is far less known. His life was not so full of adventure and furnished him with fewer themes for verse and prose. The roving life of the dervish made no appeals to him as it had done to his adventurous predecessor. The rose gardens, the sparkling wine, and the moonfaced beauties of Shiraz were all that he desired, and it was but seldom that he was persuaded to wander far from their delights. Even the flattering invitations of kings and princes failed to draw him from his luxurious retreat. Tamarlane invited him to Samarcand and the King of Bengal to his capital at Sonargaon, but only after repeated solicitations was he induced to set out upon a long journey. It was to visit Mahmud Shah Bahmani, ruler of the Deccan, and after long delays Hafiz at last set out for Ormuz, where he was to embark for India. No sooner had he set sail, however, than he became so overcome with sea-sickness that he cried out loudly to be set on shore again. Returning to

Shiraz with all speed, he composed an ode to be sent to the ruler of the Deccan in lieu of the visit he had intended, vowing never again to leave the delights of Shiraz.

There is a lightness and gaiety about the verse of Hafiz that irresistibly appeal to the Eastern mind. There is little thought for the morrow. To-day is all one's own and life is good with wine and women and song: what mortal man has need of more? Love and the joy of life are all the burden of his verse.

Give, O give love's sportful joys;
Youth and all that youth employs;
Wine like rubies, bright and red;
And the board with dainties spread;
Gay associates fond to join
In the cup of circling wine.

Give companions, who unite
In one wish and one delight:
Brisk attendants, who improve
All the joys of wine and love;
Friends who hold our secrets dear,
And the friend who loves good cheer.

Yet there are admirers of his who liken his verses to the Song of Solomon, and find in his words of love and friendship and song hidden meanings that make them but metaphors for the expression of sentiments and thoughts on things divine. These have styled his works the 'language of mystery,' and have laid stress upon the undoubted fact that a most perfect knowledge, not only of the language in which he wrote, but also of Persian life, manners and custom of his day are necessary to a full understanding of his poetry. Many of his phrases, like those of

Sadi, owing to some play upon words, are meaningless when translated into English. Yet even so it is difficult to read a hidden meaning into much of his extravagantly joyous, irresponsible verse, or to see in them allegories inculcating the tenets of true Mahomedanism. One may be forgiven if one prefers to take him as he seems on the surface, frankly Bohemian and full to the brim of boyishly infectious good spirits.

Be not sad, whatever change
O'er the busy world may range;
Harp and lute together bring
Sweetly mingling string with string.
Unto Hafiz, boy, do you
Instant bring a cup or two;
Bring them, for the wine shall flow
Whether it be law or no!

His verses are said to have excited the unbounded admiration of Tamarlane, who reproached him, however, for not having sung the praises of his capital of Samarcand. Certain lines of his, in fact, displayed what the great conqueror considered an altogether inadequate appreciation of, if not positive insult to, the great city. Hafiz had written :—

O pride of Shiraz, nymph divine!
Accept my heart and yield me thine,
Then were its price all Samarcand,
The wealth Bokhara's walls command:
For these, that mole of dusky dye
Thy cheek displays I'd gladly buy.

Tamarlane caused his displeasure at this couplet to be communicated to Hafiz, who wrote back diplomatically, 'How can the gift of words of Hafiz

impoverish Timur?' with lines to soften the great man's anger. Later Tamarlane is said to have visited Hafiz at Shiraz, and to have shown him many marks of royal favour.

Of his ancestry and earliest surroundings even tradition makes no mention. He must, however, have been well educated, and it is said that jurisprudence was his particular study. He studied religion and laws in a college founded by one Haji Kovam, Vizier of the Sultan Ilekhani, who early became his patron. Hafiz in return holds him up to public apmiration in his odes as a perfect pattern of generosity and liberality.

Of his married life we have none of the illuminating glimpses that we have of Sadi's. He was married probably early in life, and in these lines he laments the untimely termination of his conjugal happiness. 'Blest with such a wife, it was my desire to pass my latest days with her; but our wishes do not always keep pace with our power of accomplishing them: worthier of a happier state than to live with me, she fled to that society of celestial beings from whom she derived her origin.'

Hafiz died in 1389, and the story is told that no sooner had the breath left his body than a fierce controversy arose as to the disposal of his remains. He had especially desired to be buried at Musalla, a suburb just beyond his native city, where in life he had so often dallied, enjoying its beauties to the full. Some of the stricter Mahomedans of Shiraz, however, had grave doubts as to the propriety of his being buried as a Mussalman at all. One who had so openly disobeyed the strict injunctions of the

Koran, who had so openly sung of wine and love, could hardly expect in death to receive the last solemn rites of the faith. But there were many friends of Hafiz in his native city, and they defended his life and conduct with loyalty and zeal. With many words the controversy raged, until at last it seemed to his devoted followers that the mullahs with their vast influence would win the day, and that the poet whom they loved would not meet with fitting burial under the shadow of the one true faith. In the end both sides agreed to invoke the aid of chance: an omen should be drawn from the poet's own works. Opening a copy of his verses at random, the first distich on the page should give the verdict. Out of his own mouth Hafiz should be acquitted or condemned. On the page at which the book fell open were written these words:

> Forbear thou not to shed a tear
> Compassionate on Hafiz's bier,
> For know that, though now deeply mersed in sin,
> To Paradise he yet shall enter in.

So Hafiz was buried with full Mussalman rites at Musalla, on the outskirts of the city that he loved.

His grave lies nearer the city than that of Sadi, and the poet rests not alone in a garden, but in the midst of many other graves that seem to have gathered round him as if for the good-fellowship and company that he had made his own in life. Even outside the smaller enclosure the ground is scattered with long mounds and stones that mark the resting-places of the dead. Within there is scarce room to pass between the graves to that of Hafiz, which

occupies of right the central place. Enclosed by a large iron grating, elaborately coloured and designed, it completely dominates the courtyard; though it is with something of a shock at its modernity one discovers that the supports are iron telegraph posts supplied by the Indo-European Telegraph Department. There is happily, however, nothing to offend the eye. Inside the railing, the sarcophagus is of a solid block of marble placed over the tomb by Kerim Khan Zend, who caused to be inscribed upon it verses from the poet's own writings. At the head is an Arabic inscription, at the foot the date of the poet's death in 1389. Close by the grave rise tall cypresses and poplars, that cast long shadows over it, beneath whose shelter from the midday sun the thousands of pilgrims, who still come after five centuries to lay their homage at the poet's feet, find rest for contemplation. Beyond the graveyard, on a lower level and separated from it by a pavilion, is a long garden cool with water and with many trees, a perfect setting for contentment and repose.

In one corner of the graveyard a little group of mourners is kneeling beside a new-made grave. Three of them are women, closely veiled, shrouding their grief from prying eyes, only a slow swaying movement, oft repeated, indicative of the grief that lies within. One, his face hidden in his breast, stands with folded arms against the wall, his eyes fixed on the little grave as if they would pierce the earth to see again the form below. The mullah, a patriarch with white beard and wrinkled brow, bends over the open copy of the Koran on his knees. With pointing finger moving swiftly along the lines, he reads, as

if he knew it all by heart, in a low, monotonous sing-song voice that, rising and falling, keeps always the same droning nasal note.

Sitting in the pavilion over against the poet's grave, one opens his book of verse at random to read the message that he sends to the pilgrim at his grave across the centuries. The lines on which one's eyes first fall are these:

> O let not avarice tempt thy wild desires
> To toil for wealth in fortune's glittering mine!
> Small is the pittance mortal man requires,
> And trifling labour makes that pittance thine.
>
> Should the sweet gales, as o'er my tomb they play,
> The fragrance of the nymph's loved tresses bring,
> Then, Hafiz, shall new life inspire thy clay,
> And ceaseless notes of rapture shalt thou sing.

The low, monotonous voice on the further side of the courtyard ceases suddenly. No other sound disturbs the noonday stillness. One by one the mourners steal noiselessly away, the women with veils drawn closer as they pass, the man with downcast eyes and face dead set. Only the old mullah sits on: as if, one laid to rest, he patiently awaited some new-comer, his eyes turned now in contemplation towards the grave of Hafiz, as if his thoughts had bridged the centuries and knew all one in death. So in the odour of sanctity, won for him by the faith of his own verse, we leave the sweet singer of Shiraz to sleep his long last sleep.

CHAPTER IX

THE PASS OF GOD IS GREAT

It is difficult to say farewell to Shiraz. Everything tempts one to linger and to enjoy to the full this brief spell of luxurious rest by the way amidst these exquisite surroundings.

> To-morrow is not; yesterday is spent;
> To-day, O Sadi, take thy heart's content.

Yet in spite of the allurements of the poet's wisdom, read again in his own rose-gardens to the sound of running water and the singing of the nightingale, the claims of to-morrow clamour insistently. Ahead lies a long journey, and there are many other places further on that will also call aloud to linger by the way. And so, reluctantly, at last one turns one's face towards the road that leads to Ispahan.

The second stage of the journey across Persia is as unlike the first as it well could be. Instead of the continual ascents and descents of the kotals that block the road from Bushire to Shiraz there lies ahead one long stretch of comparatively level country, broken here and there by steep gradients, but maintaining for the most part an altitude of some five thousand feet. Leaving Shiraz, at a height of 4750 feet, this portion of the journey ends at Ispahan, 312 miles away at a height of

5300 feet. *En route*, however, the road rises as high as 7500 feet at Dehbid, the highest inhabited place in all Persia; but the ascents and descents, though steep enough for a heavy carriage, are more or less gradual and in no way to be compared with the steepness of the kotals. The usual manner of travelling over this portion of the route in former days was by chapar or post; but the chapar service was abolished some four years ago, and the post is now carried in wagons, which leave Shiraz and Ispahan twice a week and travel with relays of horses continuously night and day the whole 312 miles. The wagons are of the most primitive description, much like an English farm-wagon without springs; and the state of that man who rides in one is considerably worse than the first when the journey's end is reached. It has no covering against the heat of the sun by day or the intense cold of the higher altitudes by night, and in it are indiscriminately mixed up mail-bags, parcels, luggage, and passengers, the last-named being usually Persians of the lower class, and therefore by no means scrupulously clean. The jolting is like the jolting of a tumbril, and the driving of the charioteer is like the driving of Jehu, the son of Nimshi, whenever the much-enduring horses can be flogged to so much energy. There are no halts for meals by the way except while the horses are being changed, and the wagons take two nights and three days *en route*. Its one merit is its cheapness. One can drive the whole distance for something considerably under an English sovereign. But to the Englishman it is an impossible means of conveyance, though one

or two with sound limbs and little time or little cash have done it.

There remain only two other means of covering the distance, either by caravan or by the newly introduced carriage dâk. The former is far more comfortable and much less expensive, but it takes much longer time, as it is necessary to take the same animals right through without a change, and they cannot be expected to cover more than thirty miles a day at the outside. By carriage one can, on the other hand, travel day and night straight through from Shiraz to Ispahan, provided always that horses are available at the various stages and the drivers give no trouble—two essentials that in the early days of the carriage dâk at least were by no means always present. The roads, if indeed they can be called roads at all, being for the most part mere tracks across the plain, are all but impossible for a carriage, and it is a continual source of wonder all along the route how any vehicle can manage to survive. Further, the carriage itself, always an old one that has long seen its best days, may break down half-way and leave one stranded more than a hundred miles from any place where help can be obtained. Having paid 25*l.* at the start for the journey from Shiraz to Ispahan one is entirely at the mercy of the charioteers, who change at each halting-place along the route and who can take one as fast, or as slowly, or not at all, as they please. It is no longer a case of propitiating one muleteer but of bribing twenty 'kochwans' of the most offensive type. Added to all this, the discomfort of being bumped over a rough, uneven track strewn with boulders, and utterly

unprepared for driving, in a ramshackle carriage that threatens to collapse at every bump, sensibly diminishes the delights of the journey from Shiraz to Ispahan. The one great advantage of the carriage dâk is its quickness—if nothing untoward happens. The last foreigners to leave Shiraz by carriage had been held up for several days a hundred miles along the road owing to a wheel coming off their vehicle, and all the spokes breaking, making repairs even with the help of the invaluable little bit of string impossible. Fortunately they were not far from a telegraph station and so were able to telegraph back for a fresh conveyance, but it was still several days before it reached them and they were once more on the road.

There was a further difficulty at the time when I was ready to start. The supply of horses along the route is limited, so that it is never advisable to start close behind the post wagon or behind another carriage. Unfortunately the Shirazi deputies to the Mejliss, the new parliament at Teheran, who had postponed their departure from day to day for many months, had at last settled their local disputes and finally set out only two days before the date fixed for my own departure. As they occupied three carriages, thus taking twelve horses from each halting-place, they practically dislocated the whole traffic along the road, and there were often no horses available. There was, however, nothing to be done but to start ahead of the post wagon and trust to luck.

The carriage, the remains of a once fine landau, ordered for 7.30 A.M., turned up, with commendable punctuality for Persia, at 8.15. It was with many misgivings that one regarded it. The springs were

entirely hidden by many yards of rope that had been long since wound round them and that now appeared unmistakably old and unserviceable. Every single part of the conveyance looked suspiciously shaky and uncertain. It had the dilapidated air of a once well-built carriage that had been thrown aside long since as useless, and had just been drawn out from the dust of the coach-house where it had lain neglected and forgotten. Yet in it one hoped to cover three hundred and twelve miles over a road that would try the capacities of the strongest carriage ever built. It swayed ominously as it came lumbering up the drive of the Consulate, and none of the wheels ran quite straight. The four horses that drew it were stallions, and kicked and squealed as they tried to bite each other while standing before the house. The British Consul and a friend had arranged to come as far as Persepolis, and tents had been sent on ahead so that we might camp on the platform itself amidst the ruined halls and palaces of Xerxes and Darius, and have leisure to enjoy their beauties to the full. At last all was ready, and, with the luggage tied on to the carriage, anywhere and everywhere where it might find hold, with Jaffir Khan on the box, and with many misgivings, the start was made.

If Shiraz has charmed the stranger within her gates, she has kept the fairest vision of herself until the end to impress it for ever upon the memory of her departing guest. Along the broad, rough road that leads, when the river has been crossed, straight up to the Ispahan gate, the heavy carriage sways and bumps, with many an ominous creaking, towards the northern hills. Slowly, as it ascends, the city

lies spread out below, a wondrous thing of beauty that grows with every fresh ascent. The great gateway which once stretched right across the path, the Teng-i-Allahu Akbar, the Pass of God is Great, stood like an impregnable defence against attack from the north. Strongly fortified it completely commanded the entrance between the hills, and a handful of men could have held it against an army. The old gateway, like so much else in Shiraz in the eighteenth century, was allowed to fall into ruins, and the present one is entirely modern, rebuilt some hundred years ago when the need for defence against attack had almost vanished. But it is an imposing structure: with a single high pointed arch it spans the roadway, commanding a magnificent position as the northern entrance gate above the city. In the room above the arch is kept one of the treasures of Shiraz. It is an enormous copy of the Koran, beautifully inscribed, and said to weigh no less than eight stone. So venerated is it by the Shirazis that the legend has grown up that a single leaf extracted from it would weigh as much as the whole volume itself. It is supposed to have belonged to Sultan Ibrahim, grandson of Timur, and to have been written by his own hand.

It is not until the heights beyond the gateway have been reached that the full glory of the view lies disclosed. There is small wonder that this has been called the Teng-i-Allahu Akbar. When this first view of the city strikes upon the eye of the traveller from Ispahan, or lies spread to bid the departing guest farewell, there is small wonder that it calls forth from the enthusiastic wayfarer the exclamation

of astonishment and admiration, 'Allahu Akbar,' 'God is great.' It is impossible to describe its charm, the extraordinary sense of the unreality of its beauty. It is almost theatrically beautiful, like some drop-scene of a theatre, perfected into a thing of life. Away down in the midst of the vast plain lies the city, half-hidden among the trees, only its domes of flashing blue mosaics and its glittering golden minarets ablaze in the sunlight. The river, a narrow winding stream in its broad bed of yellow sand, runs like a crystal chain beside the city. The grave garden of Sadi lies an oasis of green at the foot of the hills. Beyond and on every side the hills rise up encircling the plain, their bare serrated slopes clothed in every shade of purple and brown in the morning light, and away to the right, crested with new-fallen snow, the last fall of the waning winter that the sun of spring will soon dispel. And all the perfect scene lies set in the brilliant blue of an Eastern sky and the shining clearness of a morning of spring in Shiraz. Reluctantly at last we turn away, with one last backward glance at the city which has exercised a greater charm over the stranger within her gates than any other city has ever done before; and as one goes the words of Sadi haunt one on the way:

O joyous and gay is the New Year's Day, and in Shiraz most of all;
Even the stranger forgets his home and becomes its willing thrall.
O'er the garden's Egypt, Joseph-like the fair red rose is King,
And the zephyr, e'en to the heart of the town, doth the scent of his raiment bring.

O wonder not if in time of spring, thou dost rouse such jealousy,
That the clouds and the flowerets weep and smile and all on account of thee!
If o'er the dead thy feet should tread, those feet so fair and fleet,
No wonder it were if thou shouldst hear a voice from his winding sheet.
Distraction is banned from this our land in the time of our Lord the King,
Save that I am distracted with love of thee and men with the songs I sing.

It is a stony and precipitous road that lies beyond the Pass of God is Great. It is strange but typically Persian that these few miles that form the immediate approach to the city should be the worst part of the whole road between Ispahan and Shiraz. The Kuh-i-Bamu, six thousand feet high, is the first ascent to be climbed; and close beside the road runs a small stream that would merit nothing more than a passing glance were it not pointed out as the Rukhnabad stream which Hafiz and other singers have made famous. It took its name from Rukhn-ud-Daulah Hasan who ruled over the province of Fars in the tenth century and who diverted the stream from its original course, so that it might run down and water Shiraz. Rising some twelve miles away in the northern hills it hurries down to the plains below, now nothing more than a tiny sparkling stream, whatever it may have been in days gone by. The poet Hafiz sang of it:

For sure, in all the enchanted ground
Of Paradise, there are not found,
The fountain brinks of Rukhnabad,
Musalla's bowers with roses clad.

It was doubtless some spot lower down where the stream wandered among the roses and cypresses, watering some exquisite garden as it ran in its trim-made channels, that called forth these eulogies, while Hafiz, it must be remembered, wrote five hundred years ago, and Shiraz has suffered many vicissitudes since then.

Down steep declivities from which no attempt has been made to clear the boulders that lie scattered across it, the huge, cumbersome carriage swings on its way, the wild-looking, unkempt charioteer driving straight onwards, apparently regardless of obstructions that lie in the path. He seems either to have come to the conclusion that it is less trouble to drive straight over an enormous stone in the ground rather than try to avoid it, or to have long since given up as hopeless the attempt to avoid one among so many. So we bump along regardless, hurled against one another from time to time inside, and clutching on in momentary expectation of the whole conveyance turning a complete somersault. The carriage itself would be by no means uncomfortable were the road a good one, and were one free from the fear that it was about to collapse at every bump or jolt; but as it lumbers on at the rate of about five miles an hour without catastrophe one grows hopeful, trusting that one's luck will hold, and cheered by the assurance that this is the worst portion of the whole three hundred odd miles.

Further on, down a steep descent of four hundred feet, lies Bajgah, the place of the tolls, where in former days duties were levied on all merchandise entering Shiraz. Here and there along the road are

the remains of forts and caravanserais, reminders of the days, now long past, when the Shirazis lived in constant fear of attack from the unknown north. At Bajgah is a large square stone-built caravanserai, with a great tank in front, a few forlorn trees growing near by to give the traveller welcome shade. On again, after a short halt, we pass over the same uneven road, but gradually it grows less undulating, until at last it runs straight and level towards Zerghun, which stands half-way between Shiraz and Persepolis. It is a picturesque village, a group of mud-built huts that cluster close at the foot of the hills and some way up the slopes. The charioteer seems to make straight for the hills, over the immense stretch of sandy plain, though it is evident that they admit no entrance, and that the road must wind round to the left, where the long chain of hills abruptly ends two miles beyond the village. The colouring of the hills is marvellous, changing and varying with every moment as the sun mounts higher in the sky. Rising abruptly behind Zerghun, they are a wonderful deep salmon-pink, cracked and fissured and bare of every sign of life. Away to the right they take on a more sober hue of brown and purple, while the plain itself as we draw near to Zerghun is gay with waving fields of corn. The village is famous as the home of many of the muleteers who ply along this road and over the kotals, a strong and active race inured from birth to hardship and fatigue. At the further end of the village stands the caravanserai which, in spite of its upper room, is anything but attractive, and hardly clean enough to eat one's lunch in. Written in pencil

on the whitewashed walls are the names of many travellers who have passed this way, though time and not another coat of whitewash is fast obliterating the earliest of them, which were written more than thirty years ago.

On again after lunch, the corner of the long range of hills is soon reached. For some miles further the road runs over a stretch of swampy ground, and the causeway that has been built across a portion of it, not being wide enough and too much out of repair to admit of driving over it, we decide to get out and walk across, while the carriage splashes through the swamp beside it. There is no sign of a road for the carriage to follow, and it sinks deeper and deeper into the swamp until the water almost covers the wheels. All one's bedding is tied on the back, and, even more important, one's camera, and all one's films are there too, in imminent danger of total immersion, but much shouting to the coachman elicits only the careless assurance that the worst is over and that no deeper water lies ahead, an assurance, however, quickly belied. Almost at the very next turn of the wheels the carriage sinks another two feet lower, and the water rushing in completely swamps everything. This is the worst fate that has yet overtaken the baggage, but one takes it far more philosophically than one would anywhere else than in Persia. If one's camera and sixteen dozen films have been utterly ruined it cannot be helped, and there is nothing to be done but to smile over it. But the tin hat-box saves them from so cruel a fate. A quarter of an hour later, when we rejoin the carriage, the water proves to have

penetrated very little further than the box itself, and the smaller tin box inside, in which the films had been packed, has preserved them practically dry and unhurt. But it was a narrow escape, and actually to have lost all the photos already taken, and to have had no films for future use along the road, would indeed have needed all one's newly acquired philosophy.

Away across the dead level of the plain is to be seen a peculiarly lofty bridge towards which the carriage makes its way. It is the Pul-i-Khan, spanning the river Kur, known to the ancients as the Araxes, which just before has joined the Polvar, the famous river of the Mervdasht plain whereon stands Persepolis. The Kur is here better known by its name of the Bundamir, which the poet Moore has made famous as 'Bendemeer's stream.' Its name of Bundamir, the Dyke of the Amir, comes from the fact that the enormous dam, eight miles lower down, was built by the Amir Azud-ud-Dowleh in the tenth century. The bridge that crosses the river there is of thirteen arches, and in former days the water formed a cascade beneath it. Below it were seven other dykes constructed to procure water for the irrigation of the adjoining fields. Along the banks of the stream the Amir laid out many pleasure gardens which were once famous for their beauty; but these, with the life and interest that once peopled this now deserted spot, have long since passed away. It is sad to read again the poet's words on the bare banks of the Bundamir with nothing to materialise the picture that they had always previously conjured up:

There's a bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream,
And the nightingale sings round it all the day long;
In the time of my childhood 'twas like a sweet dream
To sit in the roses and hear the birds' song.
That bower and its music I never forget,
And oft when alone, in the bloom of the year,
I think, Is the nightingale singing there yet?
Are the roses still bright by the calm Bendemeer?

No! the roses soon withered that hung o'er the wave;
But some blossoms were gather'd while freshly they shone,
And a dew was distilled from their flowers that gave
All the fragrance of summer when summer was gone.
Thus memory draws from delight, ere it dies,
An essence that breathes of it many a year;
Thus bright to my soul, as 'twas then to my eyes,
Is that bower on the banks of the calm Bendemeer.

Crossing the Pul-i-Khan and leaving the Bundamir behind, nothing separates us from Persepolis save the vast plain of Mervdasht, on the northern side of which the ruins of the great city still stand. It is a magnificent plain, shut in on every side by its encircling hills. From the Pul-i-Khan to the further side of it is some fifteen miles, and the enormous plateau is as long as it is broad. Impossible as it is seen to be, one had half imagined that something of the wonders of Persepolis would be visible even from the furthest corners of the plain. It is only necessary to set foot on this vast plateau to judge of its impossibility. On so magnificent a scale are the works of Nature that the grandest handiwork of man can occupy but the smallest space in this mighty amphitheatre and the loftiest monuments be dwarfed by this towering chain of hills that shut

them in. It is a striking fact that even here, where we had come to admire the work of man, it is the work of Nature that first compels attention. For miles, in this its own chosen setting, there is nothing to be seen of Persepolis. Well as we know the direction in which it lies, and strain our eyes as we may, there is still nothing. The spot where plain and mountain meet is still hid from sight. There is no sign of man or of his handiwork; only the greatness of Nature and one vast loneliness of hill and plain impress themselves upon the mind.

Then slowly, as we draw near, all that is left of Persepolis comes into sight. At first, as one gazes eagerly to catch the earliest glimpse, the upstanding pillars first seen look like ninepins, so vast the plain and so imposing the hills at whose foot they stand. Strangely white against the darker background of the rocks, they stand out like some childish box of bricks set up in fanciful array and carelessly thrown down. Then with every turn of the carriage wheels, as they plough heavily across the sandy plain, the pillars grow more and more distinct, revealing little by little the marvel of their stature and magnificence, though still as yet dwarfed by the greatness of their setting. It is not until one draws close to them that the full wonder of them grows and triumphs. The huge platform, 1523 feet long by fifty feet high, is itself a thing to wonder at, and above it tower aloft in magnificent array the pillars and arches and towering pedestals that were once the palaces and audience halls of the Achæmenian kings, of Darius the Great and of Xerxes, King of Kings. If at first sight they have seemed unexpectedly

insignificant, dwarfed by hill and plain, it is only that they reserve their grandeur for more intimate acquaintance. If they have seemed small beside the work of a force mightier than that even of the Achæmenian kings, they have their revenge as man, small and insignificant beside their greatness, climbs the massive staircase of one hundred and six steps, up which ten horsemen can ride abreast, and stands in awe and wonder before the Gateway of All Nations, through which the crowd of subject races passed on days of audience to pay homage to the King of Kings.

CHAPTER X

PERSEPOLIS

It is the silence and dignity of Persepolis that impress one first. Everything is on a colossal scale. Even the silence seems to have gathered a deeper solemnity and awe from the two thousand years through which it has brooded over it. Standing in the gathering twilight in front of the vast platform, the modern Western minds half fails to grasp the thought of so much splendour and antiquity. This is no rough Stonehenge, impressive but crude and without form or design. This is the magnificent work of a great people and of a civilisation that has long since been swept away; a work so magnificent and colossal that nothing in modern days, in spite of all the boasted triumphs of later centuries, has ever equalled. It is this which gives to Persepolis its unique place among the wonders of the world. These ruined halls and palaces of the Achæmenian kings form a picture of the past unrivalled among all the glories of the East. There is something at once grand and simple, magnificent and pathetic, about this silent, deserted city. Its mighty columns, towering heavenwards, still look, maimed and broken as they are, as if they defied the advance of time. Everything combines to enhance the wonder and romance. Round much that concerns the origin and building of

THE PORCH OF XERXES.

ON THE PLATFORM AT PERSEPOLIS.

this great city there still hangs a mystery. Even to carry here and place in position such enormous blocks of stone would tax the resources of the twentieth century. We can but picture in imagination the countless labourers that must have been employed, and the scenes of activity and life and interest it must once have witnessed, that now seem so far removed from the ghostly silence that has long since fallen over it. If these walls could but speak with tongues how much they would have to say of things long hidden and forgotten; of kings and dynasties that came and went; of victories and defeats; and of an emperor, the conqueror of the world, who yet failed to lay their colossal strength and triumphant beauty level with the dust, whose hate they have survived.

The modern Persian, unmindful of its wonder and its beauty, still carelessly calls Persepolis by the name of the Takht-i-Jamshid, the Throne of Jamshid, ascribing to the popular hero anything the origin of which is obscure or too much trouble to discover. Yet another name is the Chehel Minar, the Forty Columns, by which most of the early European travellers knew it, 'forty' being vaguely used to designate a considerable and uncertain number. Modern researches, however, have made it clear that this, without doubt, is the ancient capital of the greatest of the Achæmenian kings. In one of the inscriptions, still clear and decipherable after more than two thousand years, Darius the Great proudly boasts that by the grace of Ahuramazda he built this fortress 'on a place where no fortress had ever stood before.' There can be little doubt that the splendid conception of the whole scheme was his, and that the platform,

the palace known by his name, and the Audience Hall of a Hundred Columns were all his handiwork. What Darius had begun, his great son Xerxes added to and embellished, leaving to Artaxerxes the task of finishing and completing in the last days of Achæmenian rule.

The enormous platform on which the ruined halls and palaces stand is built straight out from the foot of the hills which rise almost perpendicularly behind it. In itself it is a marvellous achievement. None but an Oriental potentate with crowds of minions to do his bidding could have conceived so vast an enterprise. The full length from north to south is 1523 feet and its breadth from east to west 920 feet. In height it varies from twenty-five to fifty feet. It is built of gigantic blocks of limestone, some of them fifty feet long by ten feet wide, quarried from the rock of the Kuh-i-Rahmet, the Mount of Mercy, that backs the platform, blocks so enormous and so closely and evenly placed upon one another that it is impossible to imagine anything but some vast upheaval of Nature ever moving them from the place which they have so long occupied. On the southern wall of the platform are the four cuneiform inscriptions in three languages setting forth the full style and titles of Darius, who built it, but giving due praise to Ahuramazda, the All-knowing Lord, and invoking his blessing on the building and on the king.

Let into the front of the platform are the immense staircases that give sole access to it. Right and left the first two flights diverge, turning sharp round when more than half-way up the full height of the platform, and converging on each other, ending in one

enormous landing seventy feet long on a level with the top of the platform itself. The first flights consist of fifty-eight steps each and the upper flights of forty-eight each. The steps are twenty-two and a half feet wide and fifteen inches broad, but so shallow—only four inches deep—that riding up them on horseback is no very difficult feat. One whole staircase is hewn out of the rock on which the platform stands, while enormous slabs have supplied the other steps, as many as seventeen being carved from one block. Though here and there a portion of a step has been broken and a few small gaps occur, the staircase is marvellously preserved when one considers that it must have been in constant use for some three hundred years and that for over two thousand years it has been left to ruin and decay.

Imposing as the ruined columns and portals had looked from below, the effect is as nothing to that which strikes the eye as one stands beside them. It is only there that their immense proportions are fully evident, and the full extent of the enormous platform lies revealed. Here there is space for a city in itself. It is a scene of utter desolation, pillars broken and cast down, columns shorn of their summits, pedestals bereft of their columns, mournful, neglected, and pathetic, yet magnificent and proud, with all the pride of a greatness that has passed away. All built of the same native calcareous stone they yet have an extraordinary diverse effect. The same climatic conditions seem to have affected the stone in a hundred different ways. In one place it has become almost black, elsewhere like slate, while more often it has become so white and polished that

many writers have mistaken it for marble, and one traveller, Don Silva y Figueroa, relates that a dog he had with him became greatly enraged at seeing its image reflected in its mirror-like surface. It is a marvellous array of fallen greatness. There are three levels on the platform itself. On the first stands the Porch of Xerxes, the Gateway of All Nations, and behind it the Hall of a Hundred Columns. On the second level, which is approached by a flight of steps from the first platform, stand the highest and most imposing monuments at Persepolis, the great fluted columns that once formed the Audience Hall of Xerxes, the most magnificent building of all the group. Beyond again, on a still higher level, is the Palace of Darius, while furthest away, on the south-west corner of the platform, stand the palaces of Xerxes and Artaxerxes.

Opposite the main entrance, as one gains the platform, rises the Porch of Xerxes. It is one of the most imposing ruins that has survived, and must in its heyday have formed a magnificent entrance to the great hall that lay beyond. Facing boldly towards the plain is the first portal, two immense blocks of masonry twelve feet apart and supported by two enormous bulls. The feet of the bulls are firmly planted on huge pedestals that stand five feet above the ground, while supported by their backs and necks are the upper walls that rise to a height of thirty-six feet in all. The bulls themselves are colossal, eighteen feet high by nineteen feet long, and their attitude is the very personification of brute strength and arrogant defiance. Both have been wantonly defaced, the faces of each being sadly

marred, doubtless hacked to pieces by the insensate fury of the soldiers of Alexander. Behind the two headless portals was originally a hall or court, supported by four enormous fluted columns over forty-six feet high, two only of which still survive. The court was some eighty-two feet square, and on the further side of it still stands the portals of another gateway, corresponding to the first, but facing in the opposite direction towards the Mount of Mercy. This is incomparably the finer gateway, and it is curious that it should have faced inwards and not have occupied the more prominent position facing out over the plain at the head of the grand staircase. Here the bulls were once human-faced, though again the axe of the destroyer has marred them beyond recognition save for the heavy beards, the rings in the ears, and the immense tiaras, ending in circlets of feathers, that still survive. From the inner walls of the corridors, the outlines of their bodies stand out clearly from the walls above and below, the enormous wings, with which they have been decorated, unfurled as if beating the air, as clear cut as if two thousand years had not passed over them. Arrogance and strength are the predominating notes of the whole superb structure, magnificent even in its maimed and defaced humiliation. The defiant attitude of the bulls, their colossal proportions, their weird appearance, winged and coroneted, their whole design typifying the greatness and magnificence of Xerxes their builder and defying the world and time, make this first monument that faces one on the platform at Persepolis one of the most impressive sights it is possible to imagine.

No entry to the palace of a great king could have more impressed the many nations who came from far to lay their tribute at his feet.

On the inner walls of the first portal above the bulls are cut trilingual inscriptions, declaring them to be the work of Xerxes. They are in the cuneiform character, that character which so puzzled and annoyed the good Sir Thomas Herbert in the seventeenth century. 'Strange characters,' he calls them, 'very faire and apparent to the eye, but so mysticall, so odly framed, as no Hierogliphick, no other deep conceit can be more difficultly fancied, more adverse to the intellect. Those consisting of Figures, Obelisk, triangular and pyramidall, yet in such simmetry and order as cannot well be called barbarous and peradventure many conceale some excellent matter, though to this day wrapt up in the dim leaves of envious obscuritie.' We can well sympathise with the worthy knight as we regard these strange characters so 'adverse to the intellect,' and rejoice that others have recently 'unwrapt' them from their obscurity. Translated, a portion of the inscription reads:

'Great is the God Ahuramazda, who hath created the earth, who hath created the heavens, who hath created man, who hath given to man the gift of life, who hath made Xerxes king, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. I am that Xerxes, the great King, the King of Kings, the King of many nations, the King of this great universe, the son of Darius the King, the Achæmenian. Xerxes, the great King, saith, "By the grace of Ahuramazda I have built this Portal, the Gateway of All Nations." Xerxes the King saith: "May Ahuramazda protect me and my

empire. Both that which I have wrought and that which my father hath wrought, may Ahuramazda protect them." '

It is a proud memorial, yet not without its pathos, for behind it lurks the knowledge even in the heart of the great King, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the King of the Universe, that, in spite of all his majesty, he and his yet needed the protection of a mightier than himself. Sadder still is it to have to record that the modern globe-trotter has defaced this proud memorial, scratching his insignificant name below the royal inscription of the King of Kings. One might well have hoped that this magnificent monument of the ages, which has weathered the storms of so many centuries, might have escaped this last indignity. But the modern tourist seems incorrigible, and even here has been unable to refrain from engraving the puny record of his insignificant name, shouting aloud for all who pass this way to note its insignificance and its owner's littleness of soul, that could hasten to engrave it on this mighty monument of kings. It is fitting that the most unimportant name of all should occupy the largest space, that of an Indian official, 'dressed in a little brief authority,' whose name is cut deep with all his styles and titles following, and his wife's name tacked on behind as if it were an afterthought. It is a strange record of names, for one notices with relief that the most famous of those who have passed this way are not among them.

It is the Audience Hall of Xerxes which must, in its first glory, have been the chief among many

glories at Persepolis. Its commanding height must have been shown to full advantage, standing as it does on a raised platform eleven and a half feet higher than the level of the Porch of All Nations. The front of the platform is 316 feet long, and four flights of steps give access to it. The two central staircases project from the platform, meeting in a landing at the top, the remaining two ascending from either end. To each staircase there are thirty-one steps, the steps themselves being over fifteen feet wide, so that it is easy to conceive how great a throng they could have given ingress and egress to on days of audience, when the great king showed himself in state to all his subject peoples. The front wall of the platform is covered with sculptures in three long panels, one above the other, marvellously executed and preserved. They depict the scenes that must often have been witnessed on this same staircase—long processions of subject nations, each with the costume of his country faithfully depicted, coming to pay homage or bring tribute in the shape of rams, asses, oxen, camels, with fruit, jewels, and ornaments of many kinds. Beside these come warriors with shields and spears or bows and quivers, courtiers and musicians, with escorts of horses and chariots, all swelling the triumph of the King of Kings. At the ends are huge representations of combats between the lion and the bull, doubtless symbolical of the victory of Xerxes, the lion of the land, over all his enemies. The cuneiform inscription on the staircase says proudly: 'I am Xerxes, the Great King, the King of Kings, King of all Nations, King even to the end of this great

earth.' Thus saith Xerxes, the Great King: 'Everything that has been created by me here and everything that has been created by me elsewhere, I have created by the grace of Ahuramazda. May Ahuramazda protect my kingdom and all that I have created.'

On the platform itself rise thirteen enormous columns, all that are left of the seventy-two that once formed the great Audience Hall. Their great height and position, sixty-four feet above the second level, make them the dominating feature of Persepolis. It was here that Xerxes held court, surrounded by all the pomp of the greatest of Eastern potentates nearly twenty-four centuries ago. Stately and magnificent, these few remaining pillars still testify to later ages of the splendour of the structure of which they once formed a part. Recent years have apparently dealt hardly with these same columns, and the story of the last two centuries is one of a steadily diminishing number. But little over two hundred years ago the record is of twenty still standing. Seven have since fallen, but when they fell and what has become of them still remains unrecorded. Of the roof that must once have covered them no trace remains. Probably of cedar-wood, it has long since perished, and such has been the fate of the walls also, if walls there ever were. The fact, however, that no trace whatever is to be found of them favours the theory that this magnificent audience hall was never enclosed, but merely hung with tapestry and the gorgeous hangings that every Eastern monarch loves.

Beyond lies yet another platform, ten feet higher

still. This is the highest part of the whole palace-city, and on it stands the palace of Darius. This must have been one of the first buildings at Persepolis, and in spite of its earlier date it is far better preserved than the later buildings of Xerxes and of Artaxerxes. The central hall is fifty feet square, and six of its enormous doorways and several windows and niches still survive. On one of the doorways we can yet see Darius himself depicted, passing through in state as he must often have done in life, with attendants bearing the royal umbrella and the fly-flap to keep off the insects which alone were no respecters of the person of the King of Kings. Another representation of Darius shows him doing combat with a monster, which with one hand he holds by the horn and with the other stabs with a dagger. In this palace are a number of inscriptions, one of them, originally repeated no fewer than eighteen times round each window and niche, stating simply, 'I am a stone built in the house of Darius the King.' Another inscription states that the building which was not finished by Darius was completed by Xerxes, his son, while yet another states that one of the entrances was made by Artaxerxes III. (361–338 B.C.) more than a hundred and fifty years after the original edifice had been begun. Beyond, and facing the palace of Darius, in the extreme south-west corner of the platform, stood another building, approached by a double stairway, ruined beyond hope of conjectural reconstruction, but which is known as the Palace of Artaxerxes, who, according to the inscription that still remains, either built or restored it in the last days of Achæmenian rule.

Immediately behind this building and facing north is the Palace of Xerxes, one of the three largest buildings on the platform, only the Audience Hall of the same monarch and the Hall of the Hundred Columns surpassing it in size. It is built partly on the actual rock, which here rises to the level of the platform, and is approached by two double flights of steps surmounted with elaborate sculptures, which, unlike most of the stairways, have unfortunately suffered much at the hands of time or the destroyer. At the grand entrance once stood a portico of twelve columns, and beyond lay the central hall supported by thirty-six columns, only the bases of which now survive. The doorways, pillars, and windows are rich in sculpture, the effigy of the great king who built them remaining upon them in indelible presentment of stone, walking proudly as of old beneath the royal umbrella, with his courtiers by his side. This in all probability is the Palace in which Xerxes lived, moving over to his audience hall to hold his court and for the great receptions on occasions of state and ceremony. Close by is a high mound of earth, the purpose of which has never been explained, and which so far has never been fully explored. It forms a tempting field for research, since within or beneath it may lie much that would add to our knowledge of Persepolis. Behind the mound and the Palace of Darius is yet another ruined structure, known as the Portico of Darius, or more vaguely as the Central Edifice. It is remarkable even in its ruined state for its sculptures. The king, as always, is the central figure, but here above him hovers the god Ahuramazda in a

winged halo as if in blessing. Yet another new bas-relief is that of the king seated on a triple throne, three rows of nine figures each supporting it with uplifted arms.

Furthest back of all the buildings on the platform, and nearest the mountain that flanks it, is the largest and most palatial structure at Persepolis, and the second largest in the ancient world. It must also be one of the oldest, if not the oldest, of all the buildings, since it was the audience hall of Darius himself. Better known as the Hall of the Hundred Columns, it must have been a magnificent structure. Covering an area 225 feet square, its hundred columns were arranged in ten rows, and the four great doorways faced each of the four points of the compass. There were in all forty-four stone doorways, windows, and niches, and the walls were over ten feet thick and doubtless of sun-dried bricks, all traces of which have long since perished. Not a single one of the columns has survived, but the doorways, mutilated and decayed, still stand, and depicted upon them Darius still slays monsters, sits upon his triple throne beneath a gorgeous canopy, or passes proudly on beneath the umbrella with the insignia of his state. The sculptures here are more elaborate and pretentious than any on the platform, and the king, clad in a flowing robe, with crown upon his head, beneath which escapes the bushy well-curled hair, more regal and majestic. The porch of sixteen columns in two rows that once led to it is now only a thing of ruins, time or man having treated it more cruelly than the Portal of All Nations. Not far off is a huge rock-hewn cistern which doubtless in days

gone by provided the fountains and running water, and fed the gardens with which every Persian king has always loved to adorn his palace.

Cut in the face of the rock that backs the platform are three royal tombs. The greatest and earliest of the Kings of Kings lie five miles off in the magnificent sepulchres at Naksh-i-Rustam in the side of the hill known as the Hosain Kuh, and these three behind the platform at Persepolis were prepared, it is supposed, for the later Achæmenian kings, for Artaxerxes II. (405–361 B.C.), for Artaxerxes III. (361–338 B.C.), and for Darius III. or Codomannus (336-330 B.C.), in whose day the end came. Though wanting much of the magnificent situation, the grandeur, and solitude of the four tombs on the side of the Hosan Kuh, these three are singularly impressive. The first is almost directly behind the Hall of the Hundred Columns and unlike those at Naksh-i-Rustam is easily ascended from below. The doorway opening straight into the face of the rock was formerly blocked by enormous slabs of stone, but the lower portion has been broken away, giving access to the vaulted chamber behind. Within, also carved out of the solid rock, lie two enormous sarcophagi, one behind the other, four feet deep, four feet broad, and over nine feet long, truly last resting-places commensurate in size with the dignity in life of the kings whose bodies they were made to hold. The enormous lids behind which they fondly thought in the pride of life that they would rest in death, immune from desecration, lie broken above them. The tombs themselves gape empty, a speaking sermon on the vanity of human greatness and man's designs. The

front of the tomb above the doorway is elaborately carved, two panels containing the figures of courtiers with uplifted hands, with a frieze of lions and the king above standing before an altar over which hovers the spirit of the god Ahuramazda. The second tomb is some three hundred yards further south, standing in a recess in the rock and contains three rock sarcophagi. In design it is almost exactly similar to the first, but its chief interest lies in the fact that it is popularly supposed to be the tomb of Artaxerxes III., who in life was responsible for some of the glories of Persepolis, proving himself in that direction at least a worthy successor of Xerxes and Darius. The third and last tomb is unfinished, and if, as supposed, it is the tomb designed but never destined to contain the body of Darius III., the reason of its unfinished state is not hard to seek. In his day came the final overthrow of his dynasty, and Alexander the Great and his conquering hordes appeared to destroy Persepolis, preventing the body of the last Achæmenian king, after his tragic death, from ever being laid to rest in the tomb he had prepared.

All day has been spent in exploring these magnificent remains. They have held a fascination that no other monuments of past days have ever done, and beside which the wonders of India pale into insignificance. To ascend the great stairs, once thronged by countless hosts of every nation, to pass between the towering bull-flanked pillars of the Porch of Xerxes and enter the magnificent halls of audience where once the King of Kings sat in state, carries one back in spirit beyond the centuries.

There is something in the very atmosphere of these colossal ruins that spurs the imagination. Sitting before the Porch of All Nations, as the light begins to fail, and impregnated with the spirit of the past, old scenes once more come back to life. In front a magnificent panorama lies outspread. Truly the great king who chose this site for his capital had an eye for effect. The platform commands an almost complete view of the enormous plain of Mervdasht, fifteen miles long by fifteen broad, entirely encircled by towering cliffs that shut it in like some great amphitheatre of the gods. No setting could be finer and nothing in the East could well surpass the view on which the Achæmenian kings looked down from the lofty elevations of their halls and palaces. Away to the right stand out three great rock islands, the Three Domes, some five or six miles off, the only heights that break the level of the plains. The breadth and grandeur of the outlook rivet the imagination. The sun begins to set in gorgeous array across the western hills, and the great gaunt monuments of a past day throw long shadows across the platform. The death-like silence that broods always over the ruined city seems to grow deeper in the gathering twilight. A great loneliness settles upon hill and plain. Man and every living creature seem to have deserted the fallen city. No beast of prey now haunts the ruins. Only the lizard, sinister and leering, creeps over the stones and mocks their vanished greatness:

> They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
> The courts where Jamshid gloried and drank deep,
> And Bahram, that great hunter, the Wild Ass
> Treads o'er his head and he lies fast asleep.

One by one in imagination pageant pictures pass before the eye. Darius the great king comes across the plain, a vast army and a glittering company of courtiers in his train, and halting here where the platform now stands chooses it for his capital, where every spring at the time of Nauroz he may come to hold his court and receive in state the homage of his subject peoples. Already the workmen, a countless multitude, busy like ants, have begun the herculean task, Darius himself ordering and directing, designing this city to testify for all time to come the greatness of him Darius, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The noise of pick and hammer ring out over the plain as they quarry the stone in the Kuh-i-Rahmet behind, and the gigantic stones and pillars are carried down the mountain side and set in place. All the most skilled workmen in his dominion have been gathered here to sculpture his royal features on wall and portal, and to depict in stone the scenes that should make his name live for ever. Rapidly under the eye of this mighty potentate, to whom to order is to be obeyed, the Hall of Darius and the still more splendid Hall of the Hundred Columns rise into being. Meanwhile the plain beyond is covered with a great city, an Eastern city of a day, built of wattle and mud and sun-dried bricks, passing as lightly as it came, all the solid permanence and magnificence of masonry reserved for the halls and palaces of kings.

The years have passed, and Xerxes, the great son of a great king, sits in his father's place in the wonderful new Hall of Audience that he has built. It is the morning of Nauroz, in all the perfect new-year glory of a Persian spring. In one long

unending procession there comes across the plain a host innumerable, from the north and from the south and from the east and from the west, on foot, on horseback, and in chariots, bearing costliest gifts to lay with their homage at the feet of the King of Kings. The Grand Stairway is alive again with the passing of many feet. Through the awe-inspiring Portal of All Nations, they pass on up the second staircase, with growing wonder at the mural sculptures that depict the very scenes of which they themselves form a living part, and enter at last with reverent feet the Hall of Audience, moving among the pillars until at last they come into the presence of the king. Seated on his triple throne, clothed in purple and fine linen, his diadem upon his head and his courtiers surrounding him on every side, with a canopy of cloth of gold above his head, Xerxes the king sits in the pride of his might, passing swift judgments that mean life and death to nations. Is there cause for wonder that amidst so much magnificence the boastful cry goes up, 'O King, live for ever'?

So for a century and a half the glory of Persepolis continues, one long pageant of splendour and triumph. Then the end draws near. Within the palace that he had built, the last structure that was to be added to the glories of Persepolis, the last great Achæmenian king lies dead. Over all the platform and on the plain below a vast crowd gathers. The mournful music of the musicians and the wailing of the women float out across the plain, as with all the pomp and stateliness that the king had loved in life, they bear his body to the great rock tomb that he had carved, within sight of the palace where in life

he had lived and loved and held his court. Within the enormous sarcophagus hewn out of the solid surface of the rock they place his body, the huge stone lid is lifted into place, and the slab of stone that blocks the entrance is fixed and sealed. Thus they leave the King of Kings, who sleeps unwitting of the destruction that is so near at hand, guarded as he vainly hopes against intrusion and decay.

There is one last scene. Consternation and terror reign in the Achæmenian camp. News has come of the tragic end of Darius Codomannus, last of the Achæmenian kings, even while pick and hammer are busy upon the rock tomb that he had designed for his own. Even while the workmen, chisel and mace in hand, pause in gaping wonder at the news there arises a great clamour from below. Far away across the plain, the dust of a great army, moving slowly on towards the doomed city, rises like smoke obscuring earth and sky. It is only for a brief space that it is forced to halt while a bridge is hastily thrown across the Araxes; but while it waits, there takes place one of the most pathetic scenes that even the Mervdasht plain has ever witnessed. Unheeded in the general confusion at Persepolis, a company of Greek captives, four thousand strong, has hurried out across the plain to meet the conqueror, who has come too late to save them from all but death, yet whom they welcome as their great avenger. Eagerly they press towards the tent of Alexander to tell him of their fate. 'Some had their feet cut off,' writes their historian, 'others had been deprived of their hands and eyes, and all their bodies had been branded with barbarous characters. Thus they had been reserved for the diversion of

their inhuman enemies. They resembled uncouth images, distinguishable only as men by their noise. They excited more tears than they shed. When they cried out that Jupiter, the avenger of Greece, had at last awoke, all the auditors sympathised in their sufferings as their own. The king having dried his tears said to them, "Reserve courage; you shall again see your native land and all that you hold dear."'

Quickly the last scene of all follows at Persepolis. The avenging host has come. Alexander himself has mounted the great staircase and taken possession of the halls and palaces and the fabulous wealth that they contain. Already there is the sound of revelry. The stately Hall of Audience has become the conqueror's banqueting hall, and within, with his courtiers and princes, he carouses, mocking the magnificent handiwork of his foes. It may have been thus, in drunken mood, as many historians relate, urged on by Thais the courtesan, that the order went forth to burn and destroy, the conqueror himself leading the mad orgy, torch in hand, to lay in ruins that city the like of which even he, with all his triumphs, could not build. Or it may be that deliberately and of set design he destroyed this capital that was the very pride and glory of the Achæmenian kings, intending thereby to impress upon the people whom he had subdued that a greater than they had come to rule over them. Over that last scene there lies a veil that no historian has lifted. Yet, whether of wanton caprice or set design, it is difficult to forgive the conqueror who made so poor a conquest of himself.

Seeing visions and dreaming dreams, one sits at the head of the great staircase as the twilight deepens. The tinkling of the bells of the pack-mules on the plain below and the incessant croaking of the frogs float upwards. All else is a great silence. Away across the plain the sun sets in a ball of purple flame, and sinking out of sight bathes the distant hills in every glorious shade of orange and gold that reflects a warm and glowing light upon the maimed columns and ruined capitals. Then, paling beyond the softest blush of pink, the light at last dies to a delicate soft green haze that holds the hills as in an afterglow, until they one by one sink sombrely to rest, engulfed within the 'bowl of night.' Then, unwitting of the change, one's eyes come back again to the great platform, and, lo, a miracle has happened. Seen at sunrise, at noonday, and at evening, all the beauties of Persepolis seemed to have been laid bare. But this is the greatest wonder of them all. Even as the day dies, the world is lit by the light of the moon and a myriad stars, that clothe the giant columns and headless portals anew in clear and brilliant radiance. The shining whiteness seems to accentuate all that they have typified before. Their utter loneliness and neglect, their pathetic fall from a greatness that once was theirs, seem yet more wonderfully mingled with their majesty in decay, their mute triumphant protest against the warring hand of time and man. The thirteen columns of the Audience Hall of Xerxes tower heavenward, stiff and black against the star-light sky, as if they mourned their fellows, yet defied the ages to lay them with the dust. Beyond,

the headless pedestals and gateways of the hall of Darius, King of Kings, rise ruined but triumphant. Nearer at hand, most massive of all, that still draws all nations to wonder at its beauty, the Porch of Xerxes looms overhead, solemn and majestic, silent yet eloquent of the centuries that have passed: eloquent yet guarding sphinx-like the secret of the ages. And as one looks upon them one knows that the proud boast of the Achæmenian kings has been fulfilled, and that, so long as the world lasts, in this their handiwork these Kings of Kings shall live for ever.

CHAPTER XI

NAKSH-I-RUSTAM

There remains still much to be seen on the morrow on the Mervdasht plain. Here in their capital the first and greatest of the Achæmenian kings had lived and feasted, and held court. Five miles away across the plain, when death had summoned even the Kings of Kings, their bodies lay in state in their great rock sepulchres, their resting-places in death as finely conceived and executed as the halls and palaces they had loved in life.

Leaving the platform after an early *chota haziri* in the Porch of Xerxes, as the sun rises, we set our faces northwards along the foot of the hills. Two miles away, hidden so carefully in a bay of the rocks that the finding of them is not easy, are three Sassanian bas-reliefs, known to the natives as the Naksh-i-Rajab. They are similar in character to those at Shapur, and evidently, from the inscription that survives, carved at much the same period. Beautiful as they must once have been before partial destruction overtook them, the fact that they are cut in a recess in the rocks gives them none of the prominence and splendid effect of those at Shapur. The first of them represents Ardeshir (A.D. 226–241), the founder of the Sassanian dynasty and the father

of his still more famous son Shapur I. On the right is the figure of the king in the act of receiving the crown at the hands of the god Ahuramazda. Both god and king are on horseback, but the figures have suffered much from deliberate attempts to efface them. In the second tablet it is the same scene, but both figures are on foot, and the king is probably Shapur I. (A.D. 241–272). He stands facing the god, their right hands clasping the royal circlet in the centre. Between them are the figures of two children, probably the sons of the king; while behind stand two attendants, one of whom holds a fly-flap behind his royal master. The remarkable feature of this bas-relief, however, is the fact that it contains what are apparently the figures of two women—a most unusual portrayal in Sassanian art, and only once again seen either here or at Shapur. In the third bas-relief Shapur rides on horseback, attended by his courtiers and bodyguard on foot. This is by far the best preserved of the three, the chiselling being deeper, and the figures still standing out in wonderfully clear relief.

These bas-reliefs are especially interesting as proving, if further proof were needed, that there must have been a city of importance on the Merv-dasht plain long after the Achæmenian kings had passed away. The city of Istakhr, which once stood in their immediate vicinity, was apparently a city even before Sassanian times. It was probably the city as opposed to the Capitol, or palace quarter of Persepolis in Achæmenian days, and long survived it. So ancient is Istakhr, according to Persian legend, that it was to the 'Stronghold of Records'

within its walls that Vishtasp, the patron of Zoroaster, sent the original copy of the Avesta, which was written and bound in gold, and which tradition asserts perished in the flames of Persepolis. Yet of this once great city little remains. Not far from the bas-relief the most striking survival is a large square platform, seven feet high and forty feet square, of white limestone, known to the natives as Takht-i-Rustam, or Takht-i-Taous, the Throne of Rustam or the Peacock Throne. The latter is a name apparently bestowed indiscriminately by modern Persians, while the former recalls the deeds of Rustam, the national hero, to whom, without rhyme or reason, popular tradition ascribes so much on the Mervdasht plain. The blocks of stone of which the platform is composed are immense, some of them being ten feet long by four feet deep. There are no signs of pillars ever having stood upon it, and the most plausible theory of its *raison d'être* is that it was used as a grand stand for reviews, doubtless being covered with a canopy of silk or tapestry when the great king came in state to watch the pride and flower of his magnificent army pass before him.

There is little more to detain one here, and already the wonders of Naksh-i-Rustam rise up to face one across the intervening plain. There has been so much to marvel at in all these ruins of the past that it is with something almost of surprise that one recognises that here again is another wonder incomparable and unique. Carved in the solid perpendicular face of the cliff, which is here some hundred and fifty feet high and juts out five hundred feet into the plain, are four rock sepulchres. Three

only of them face us as we ride towards them; the fourth in an angle of the rock lies hidden till we draw near. In the centre of each, the broken doorways that lead to the vaults within gape like sightless eyes, black against the surrounding whiteness of the rock. Around them, in each case, is carved a design impressive in its simplicity. It is in the form of an enormous Greek cross, seventy feet high by sixty feet wide, carved deep into the face of the rock. The three lower arms of the cross are left plain, only the upper one being filled with bas-reliefs. The lintel of the doorway is, however, beautifully decorated and flanked by two immense columns on either side, which look as if they supported the enormous sculptured tablet that projects above. Immediately above the columns is a cornice elaborately carved, on which stands the immense bas-relief that fills the whole upper arm of the cross. In each case the subject of the picture is the glorification of the king and of Ahuramazda. At the foot of the panel are two rows of subject people supporting with uplifted hands the double daïs on which the king stands, thus even in death literally making his enemies his footstool. But here the pride of earthly majesty ends, and the king himself is a subject worshipping before the altar of the sacred fire. One hand holds a bow as if it clung to the emblem of its strength, but the other is empty and uplifted as if in the act of taking an oath or making solemn submission to the All-knowing Lord. Opposite to him, as if borne aloft in the air, is the figure of the god Ahuramazda, with the head and shoulders of a man, but all the lower part of his body indistinct as if veiled in flames of sacred

fire. Behind him stands the altar on which that same fire burns ceaselessly, while from above the sun sheds its sacred light upon the scene.

The first tomb to the right as one faces them occupies a deep natural bay in the rock. The sculptures upon it are the best preserved of all. Access to it is even more difficult than to any of the others, and there is no record of its ever having been explored. But it is the one next to it, the furthest to the right of the three that face across the plain, that is the most interesting of them all. It is the only one to bear an inscription, and consequently the only one concerning which we can speak with certainty of the identity of the king whose body once lay within. The whole of the spaces between the columns that flank the doorway are covered with the cuneiform characters, while yet another inscription has been engraved on the upper arm of the cross on the bas-relief behind the figure of the king. This is the tomb of the greatest of all the Achæmenian kings, of Darius the Great, the son of Hystaspes. As he had built for himself in life a magnificent audience hall and palace on the platform at Persepolis, so in death he designed to rest for ever in a sepulchre worthy of so great a king. No tomb that he could have devised could have been more impressive than this. Looking out from its splendid height over the sweeping plain, this rock-hewn sepulchre in the cliff seems to have made itself one with Nature herself. Impious hands may have cast down the great city that he had set up on the plain below, but not all the hate of man could obliterate this great memorial high up on the face of the cliff. It is one with the rock itself, and as long

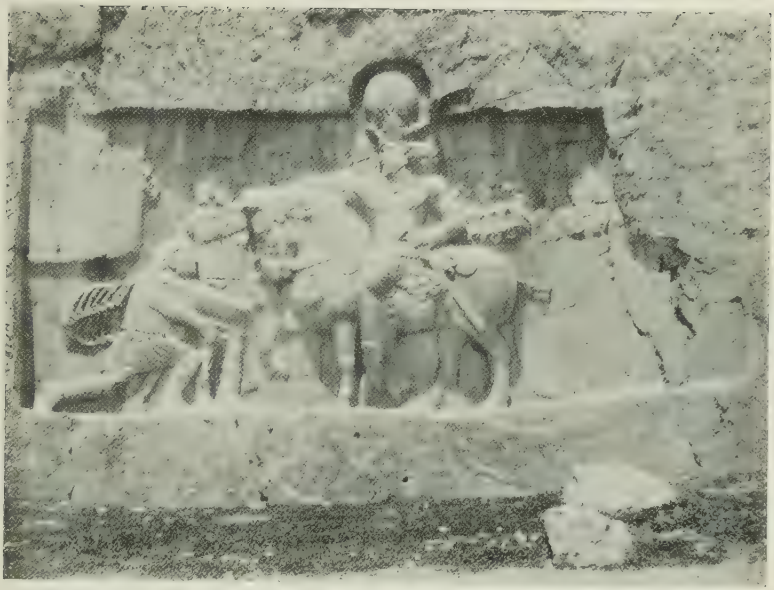
as the rock remains there will stand with it this last memorial of Darius the King.

Two stories are told of this rock tomb which lend to it an added interest. They are told by Ctesias, the Greek physician of Artaxerxes, and so, with his unrivalled opportunities of obtaining information at first hand, they should be authentic. One of them strikes a strangely human note, the one human touch that seems to have here survived of this great Achæmenian king. Enthroned aloft on his triple throne, the King of Kings has seemed removed, apart from mere human emotion. Yet that he was able to inspire a personal devotion in at least one heart is endorsed by the story that still hangs around his rock-hewn tomb. Up within the gloomy vault in the cliff side the favourite eunuch of Darius, refusing to leave his master's body, when all departed after the last funeral rites had been performed, remained in solitary watch for seven long years, till death relieved him at his post beside the sepulchre of the great king he had so long served in life. The other story is no less pathetic. When the great rock tomb was nearing completion Darius, his father, and his mother desired to see it. The Magian soothsayers, however, earnestly dissuaded Darius from entering in life the grave that was to receive his body in death, and so full were they of forebodings that the king gave up his design. The same reason did not apply to the king's father and mother, and it was arranged that they should be hauled up to inspect the tomb. There was no way, then as now, of reaching the level of the doorway save by being drawn up by ropes, and Darius deputed forty of the Magi themselves to perform the

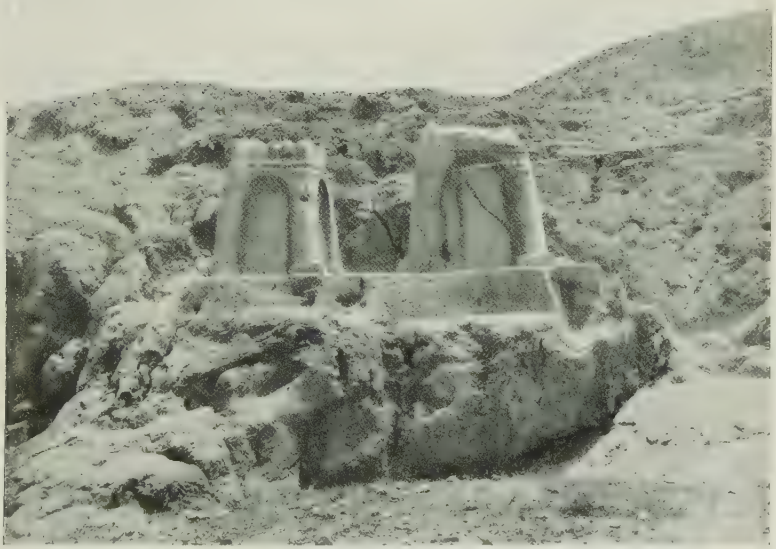
difficult task. The priests, nervous at the responsibility of hauling up such distinguished visitors, or frightened, as some say, by the sudden appearance of a snake, accidentally lost hold of the ropes, with the result that the parents of the king were dashed to the ground and killed on the spot before the eyes of Darius himself. The grief and anger of the King of Kings was uncontrollable, and not all their sanctity saved the Magi, who paid the penalty of their carelessness with their lives.

The tomb having been completed in his lifetime, it is probable that the inscriptions upon it are the very words of the great king himself, and that in them after all these centuries we can still hear Darius the king speak. Now, as always, he gives praise to Ahuramazda, the All-knowing Lord, and now, as always, he omits no one of his high-sounding styles and titles, enumerating in haughty arrogance the names and numbers of his subject peoples and his all-embracing conquests. And within the tomb, when his day came and a greater even than the King of Kings summoned him from the courts and palaces he had built, Darius the king slept his long sleep. Yet, so much for the vanity of human hopes, not all his greatness, not all the care that he had taken that his body should lie in this well-nigh inaccessible rock sepulchre, prevented his very coffin from being rifled and his bones desecrated by greedy alien hands.

There is nothing to show for whom the remaining tombs were hewn, but in all probability they were prepared for the immediate successors of Darius, for Xerxes, Artaxerxes I., and Darius II. Within



ROCK TABLET AT NAKSH-I-RUSTAM.



FIRE ALTARS AT NAKSH-I-RUSTAM.

[*See page 212.*

they are much like the tombs we have already explored behind the rock platform at Persepolis. The tomb of Darius is the largest, there being three stone cavities or coffins immediately opposite the entrance, with extra recesses on either side capable of accommodating six more in all. There is no attempt at ornamentation or decoration inside. The coffin in which the body of the Great King once rested is of plain chiselled stone, all the triumphs of the workman's art being reserved for the facings of the tomb to blazon abroad the greatness and magnificence of him who lay within.

Below the tombs of their great predecessors the Sassanian monarchs have set their seal in seven bas-reliefs along the face of the cliff almost on a level with the ground. It is from them that this locality has acquired its name, of Naksh-i-Rustam, the Pictures of Rustam, the Persian peasant to this day still cherishing the belief that these bas-reliefs represent the national hero and his famous charger. In themselves they are of much the same character as those at Shapur, and several of them represent almost exactly similar scenes. Many of the figures are exquisitely carved and wonderfully preserved, as perfect as if the workman had but laid aside his chisel yesterday. The first to the right is perhaps the most interesting of all, though much of it lies hidden behind the dust which has been blown against it and has accumulated almost to the waist of some of the figures. It represents the king on the left with bushy hair and high turreted crown, his right hand extended and clasping the circlet of royalty which he seems to share with another figure opposite to him whose

right hand grasps it on the other side. There can be little doubt that this second figure is that of a woman, and, if so, obviously of the queen who shared his throne. Between them, beneath the extended circlet, is a small figure, evidently that of a child, mutilated now almost out of recognition. There is no evidence to show whom these figures represent, though the only king whose effigy appears on coins with his queen and son is Varahan II., and the bas-relief may therefore with some probability be regarded as his. Popular tradition, however, prefers to see in it a representation of the marriage of Varahan V., the famous Bahram Gur, with an Indian princess, round whose wedded life clings so much romance in Persian legend.

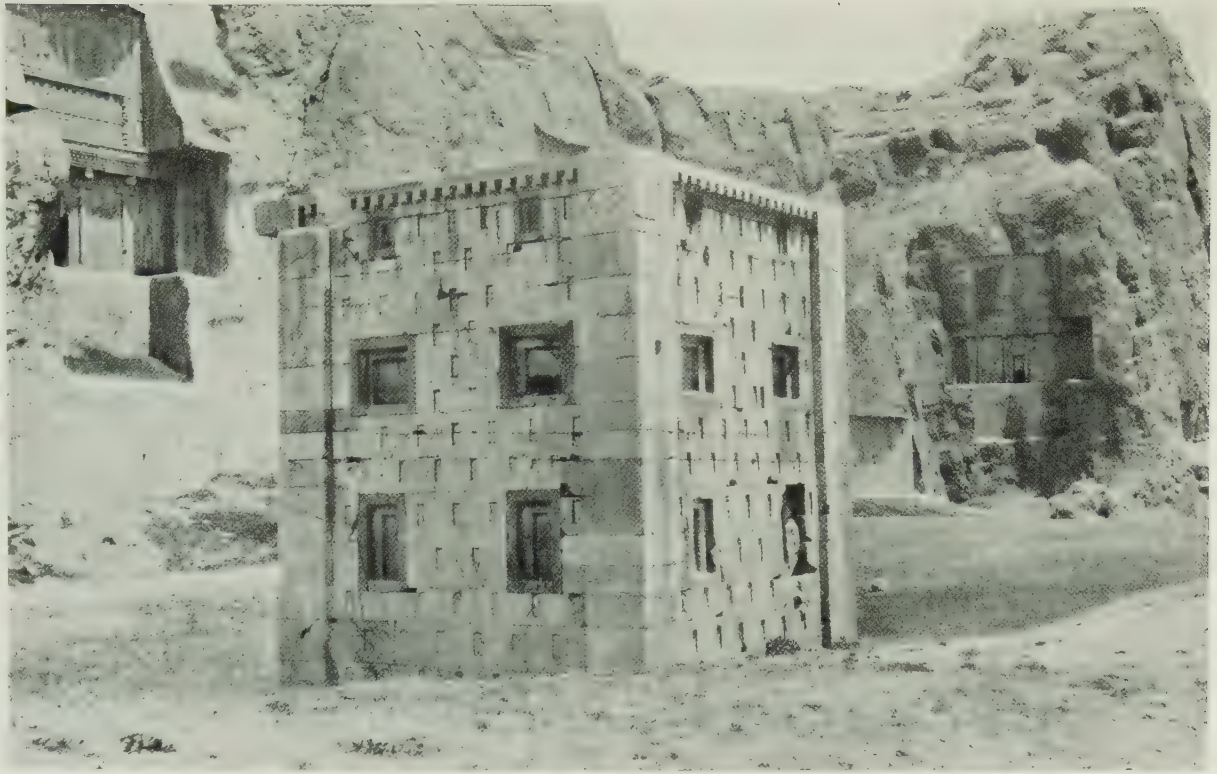
The second, third, and fifth sculptures represent quite new scenes. The other Sassanian bas-reliefs, already seen, have been altogether taken up with the pomp and majesty of kings. These three represent their personal prowess and depict the king on horseback triumphing over his foe, also mounted, but with broken spear and obviously worsted in the fray. There is a freedom of outline and abandonment about the movement of the figures, both of horses and men, which are absent from the more stately representations of the king in formal state in the other tablets, and the whole series, when it is remembered that it had to be chiselled on the perpendicular face of the rock, is a triumph for designer and workman alike. The fourth tablet is the best preserved and carries one back again to Shapur, for depicted thereon is what was evidently the favourite theme of the Sassanian kings, the

triumph of Shapur I. over the Roman emperor Valerian, who kneels a suppliant at the victor's feet. The sixth is a courtly representation of Varahan II. with his winged crown and his many courtiers; while the seventh, which is also probably the oldest of all, depicts the mounted figures, Ardeshir, the founder of the Sassanian dynasty, and the god Ahuramazda, who hands to the king a ring in symbol of his new-won sovereignty. The horses meeting in the centre with foreheads touching and heads slightly lowered look curiously as if about to butt one another. The inscriptions are engraved upon their shoulders, while beneath the feet of each lies a prostrate figure, popularly supposed to represent Volagases and Artabanus, the last Parthian kings on the ruins of whose dynasty Ardeshir raised his own.

Opposite this bas-relief, below the last tomb furthest to the left, and standing at some twenty yards distance, is a solitary square stone building round which has raged a greater controversy among *savants* than around any other survival at Persepolis. It is a small structure some thirty-five feet high and twenty-three feet square, while the only entrance to the single chamber within was by a flight of steps, now broken away, that led on the side facing the tombs to the doorway, which stood originally some sixteen feet above the ground. The whole of the lower part of the building is apparently a solid block of masonry, while the walls of the room itself are nearly six feet thick, leaving a space only some twelve feet square by eighteen feet high in the entire building. There were no windows, and the door was once a slab of stone hung on pivots, the marks of

which can still be traced on the lintels of the doorway. What this building was originally intended for not all the many recent inquiries and investigations at Persepolis have been able definitely to decide. There are the remains of a similar building, near the tomb of Cyrus, to be seen later on at Pasargardæ, but nothing has survived authoritatively to tell us for what use they were designed. To the natives of the locality, vague and indifferent, the one here at Naksh-i-Rustam is known as the Kaabah-i-Zerdusht, the Shrine of Zoroaster. The theory, however, that it was a fire temple is unsupported by evidence, and is, moreover, opposed to early Zoroastrian practice. It is a striking fact that, so far as is known, there is no building of any kind especially designed for religious purposes at Persepolis. The very nature of the Zoroastrian creed precluded the necessity of such buildings, and the two undoubted fire-altars that have survived are carved out of the rock close by, fully exposed to the light of the sun, whose adoration formed so large a part of the worship of Ahuramazda. Many other theories have been advanced to settle the vexed question, but the most probable explanation seems to be that the building was originally a mausoleum, built prior to the inception of the idea of the rock caves, and it is possible, as many writers have suggested, that it once contained the body of Hystaspes, father of Darius, who met so tragic a death in its immediate vicinity.

Round the westernmost spur of the Husein Kuh are the last, and not least interesting, of all the remains at Naksh-i-Rustam. Their very simplicity



THE BUILDING OPPOSITE THE TOMBS OF THE KINGS AT NAKSH-I-RUSTAM, ROUND THE ORIGIN OF WHICH SO MUCH CONTROVERSY HAS RAGED.

and primitiveness are arresting after all the magnificence one has seen, carrying one back in thought beyond the pride and majesty of kings to the very beginnings of the Zoroastrian faith. Cut out of the face of the rock, some twelve feet above the level of the plain, are two fire-altars, the only actually religious relics on all the Mervdasht plain. Some five and a half feet high a parapet runs round the top, within which a hollow has been carved to contain the sacred fire. Coming after all the wonders of Persepolis and Naksh-i-Rustam, these two fire-altars, simple and unadorned, with no pompous inscription and no outward beauty of form, looking out across the plain and bare to all the winds of heaven, are strangely impressive. In imagination one is carried back again to the earliest days of Zoroastrian worship, that marvellous religion which has survived the ages and raised its little band of faithful votaries to so great a pitch of prosperity to-day. The sacred fire leaps up on the altars, and the Magi, its attendant priests, looking deep into it, see signs and portents, holding captive the assembled crowd below, who with bated breath, in the light of the fire and the sun, await the will of the great god Ahuramazda, the All-knowing Lord.

The long round of wonders on the Mervdasht plain is ended at last, and one rides away impressed and awed, half weary with so many and such unaccustomed sights. Turning back the three rock sepulchres long stand out on the face of the cliff, still proclaiming aloud after more than two thousand years the greatness of Darius the king. So much has gone, yet so much remains. The body of the king

has been torn from his rock fortress and his grave desecrated, yet not all the rage of his enemies, nor the obliterating hand of time, nor all the elements combined have been able to destroy his handiwork. It is of little moment that the dust of the great king has been scattered over the plain, for over these, the works of his hands, his spirit still hovers and will abide so long as the world shall last.

CHAPTER XII

AT THE TOMB OF CYRUS

The post-horses from the little chapar khana at Puseh, two miles from Persepolis, were ordered for four o'clock in the afternoon. The start forward again on the northern journey had been arranged for six o'clock, so that one might see again the wonders of sunset and moonrise over the ruins of Persepolis; but some experience of Persian ideas of punctuality had suggested the advisability of ordering the horses two hours at least before they were required. That they had failed to arrive by five o'clock occasioned small surprise, and at half-past the Consul, who was riding back that night to Zerghun, on his return to Shiraz, had ridden off across the plain leaving one still waiting. Anxious as one was now to take the road again, it was difficult to regret the delay as once more night fell in all its beauty and solemnity over the Mervdasht plain and the ruined glories of Persepolis. Yet when seven o'clock arrived and still no horses had appeared it seemed time to send off a man in search of them, while one dined at the head of the great staircase beneath the canopy of sky and stars. At nine o'clock came the news that there were no horses in the chapar khana, except the four reserved for the

post-wagon, which was already overdue. This meant a serious delay if the return of the four horses, after having taken on the post-wagon the next stage, had to be awaited. Fortunately the Consul had kindly left two of his sowars to see us safely on the road, and one of them was despatched with all speed to procure those four post-horses at all costs. Great is the power of an Indian sowar even in a strange land, and by ten o'clock two of the four horses had arrived. The carriage had been kept at Persepolis, so that only two horses had been brought to drag it to Puseh, where the other two awaited us. So finally we set out, over four hours late, with a last backward glance at Persepolis as it stood out clear and white in the moonlight, before a turn in the road hid it finally from view. Then wrapped in every available coat and rug, for the air was intensely cold, one made oneself as comfortable for the night as the carriage and the jolting of the road allowed.

Just when all seemed well, however, we came to a sudden halt. Getting off his seat on the box, Jaffir Khan explained that a very bad bit of road lay ahead, and that it was advisable for the saheb to get out and walk. But there had been many bad bits of the road before, and nothing seemed more undesirable than to get out and walk when one had just got comfortably settled for the night. Jaffir, however, was insistent. It was much better that the saheb should get out and walk. So with much grumbling one got out and then—one was glad one had. On one side of the road, if that can be called a road which was no road at all, rose straight up like a wall the steep side of the cliff. On the other

side, with barely enough room for the carriage to pass between, yawned an enormous pit, some twenty-five feet in length and width and ten feet deep. There was no other way round and nothing for it but to advance and hope for the best. The coachman got down from the box and led the horses, and slowly the carriage passed on almost into safety. Then exactly how it happened it is difficult to say, but suddenly, as if it had been drawn by a magnet, the back wheel went over the edge, and in a twinkling the whole carriage had turned a complete somersault and fallen with a crash into the pit, its four wheels waggling helplessly skywards. The most extraordinary part of the catastrophe was that the horses still stood on the road as apathetic and as unalarmed as if nothing had happened. The pole and harness were so utterly rotten that they had all given way with the weight of the falling carriage, leaving the horses entangled in much broken harness, but free.

It needed all one's sense of humour to see the amusing side of the adventure, yet there was something irresistibly comic and Persian in the whole affair. It was the middle of the night, with no carriage nearer than Shiraz over forty miles away, and no habitation anywhere within range save the tiny chapar khana at Puseh, whence little help was to be expected. There was no one on the spot save the coachman, who was completely dazed by the sudden catastrophe, and the faithful Jaffir, resourceful and full of energy but still hardly equal to hauling a landau out of a pit ten feet deep. There was only one hope, that the sowars and the Consul's servants with the tents had not yet started

from the platform at Persepolis, and thither Jaffir Khan was despatched at top speed. For the best part of an hour one had nothing to do but to sit and contemplate the wreck of the carriage and all one's belongings scattered over the bottom of the pit, clearly visible in the brilliant moonlight. The coachman sat on a stone gazing at them, too, with a sleepy stare that was comic at first, but grew annoying as the minutes passed and no help came. Never was the beat of galloping hoofs more welcome when at last they were heard across the plain. Their first astonished survey of the situation over, the businesslike energy of the sowars contrasted strangely with the apathy of the Persian coachman. Fortunately the invaluable piece of rope was handy, but, even so, haul and try as they might, there seemed no possibility of getting the carriage out, the sides of the pit being practically perpendicular. The whole carriage was so rotten that it was dangerous to use too much strength lest only the fragments that remained might reach level ground. In that same carriage, unless one sat on the road till another could arrive from Shiraz, one still had to do nearly three hundred miles. At last, however, the brilliant idea occurred of taking off the wheels, and this done the body of the carriage after many fruitless attempts was finally hauled out. It had looked old and worn at the start, but that was nothing to what it looked then, as with much difficulty the wheels and pole were again attached. The hood had been completely smashed, and no amount of string thereafter could force it into place. But one was only too thankful to be off again, in a

carriage not really very much the worse from a means of conveyance point of view considering its amazing somersault, to be critical of appearances.

It was long after twelve o'clock by the time we reached Puseh, and as if one misfortune were not enough for one night the first object we could discern outside the chapar khana was the post-wagon already arrived. The horses that had brought it had hurried off back to Zerghun, doubtless fearful lest they should be compelled to do another dâk. There were thus only four horses for the post-wagon and our own carriage. If the post-wagon got them it would mean a wait of nearly another day. That had to be prevented at all costs, and consequently one approached the post-driver and spoke him fair. He was an imposing-looking personage in uniform, with the air and manners of a general of brigade, and he hastened to leave one in no doubt as to his importance. He was the driver of his Majesty the Shah's imperial post, and as a courier of the King of Kings must assuredly take precedence of any private traveller. Even a bribe judiciously offered had no effect upon him, the triumph of driving away and leaving the foreigner behind being evidently more to be desired by him than much fine silver. He had already got the two horses that had remained in the chapar khana, and he must have those in the landau also. Expostulation and entreaty alike had no effect upon him, and at last one left him in despair. The two sowars and Jaffir Khan immediately took up the tale, and a long and animated conversation began in which both sides indulged freely in much vituperation.

Meanwhile the passengers in the post-wagon,

seven in number, sat huddled among the post-bags placidly awaiting events. It was as well they took no active part in the dispute or we should have been altogether outnumbered, and it was evident that but for the sowars the post-driver would have forcibly taken matters into his own hands. As it was, it looked for a time as if there was going to be a free fight. The post-driver at last actually seized one of our horses and attempted to put it in the post-wagon, before the sowars could intervene. Then the sowars retaliated and seized one of the post-horses, and one had to intervene oneself to prevent them coming to blows. After that the post-driver retired to his wagon and obstinately and ostentatiously made himself comfortable for the night. If he was not allowed to go on, neither should we, and so for hours we sat on through the darkness in a state of armed neutrality, each party showering abuse upon the other, yet quaintly enough passing the kalyan backwards and forwards between them as if it were a pipe of peace. It was only after hours of wrangling that drowsiness overcame even animosity and there came the truce of sleep.

It was a cold chill awakening in the first morning light. The post-wagon still stood motionless, the passengers huddled almost out of sight amongst the baggage. The sowars, seated cross-legged on the ground, still held the horses while Jaffir Khan slept close by. Overhead the stars were disappearing one by one, while the whole of the vast plain was wrapped in a soft white mist that slowly lifted as the light climbed over the eastern hills. From out the mist a long string of camels came with silent tread like

phantoms. It was bitterly cold, and the cup of tea that Jaffir Khan, awakened from his deep sleep, quickly prepared was very welcome. Then one by one the other figures roused themselves, and the post-driver without a word, but with a most expressive glance in our direction, swaggered off towards the chapar khana. The sowars immediately took the opportunity to seize his horses, and he only arrived in time to prevent them being harnessed to the landau. Then again began a wordy war with renewed energy. Having held out for five hours all through the night it was impossible to give in then; yet there appeared no chance of getting all four horses, when suddenly the post-driver, without any previous sign of weakening, threw up the game. One's determination had evidently won the day, and in a voice of infinite despair he gave us permission to take the horses. With great joy and all speed we began to harness them, but, alas! all was not yet well. One of the passengers now woke up and proved fractious. He must reach Sivend that morning, he protested, and he roundly abused the post-driver for not getting him there. That much harassed individual wavered again, and by the time we had got three horses harnessed refused to give us the fourth, and went off to consult with the camel drivers. If they had sided actively with him all would have been up; so we made the best of it, and eyeing the irate passenger, a most unwholesome-looking individual, with much dislike, offered him a lift in the landau. He accepted with alacrity, and, though a most undesirable and odoriferous fellow-traveller, proved at once so strong an ally against

the post-driver that we were soon at last on the road, leaving his Majesty's mail still stranded outside the chapar khana.

The way northwards runs up the Polvar valley at the entrance to which on the spur of the Husein Kuh, long kept in sight, are the great rock-tombs of Darius and the Achæmenian kings. Past Hajjiabad, a village on the northern hillside, its Sassanian sculptures perforce left unexplored, the road runs on to Saidun, at a bend in the valley, a charming picture of clustering roofs and many gardens like oases of colour on the dull brown plain. Then the valley narrows and the carriage bumps over perilous places along the banks of the Polvar with hairbreadth escapes, that make the eyes of one's unwelcome and evil-smelling fellow-traveller bulge almost out of his head and cause him fervently to exclaim 'Yah, Allah!' as we almost topple over, or a relieved 'Allahu Akbar' (God is Great) as we right ourselves and career on more wildly than before. He is curiously reticent about himself, this same fellow-traveller. He might be the most guilty of criminals or the most secret of spies for all the information one can extract from him. It is with something of surprise that one discovers he can talk French, yet the most illuminating piece of information about him one has acquired after half-an-hour's conversation is that he is of the 'maison du roi.' At the next stage one parts from him without regret.

Sivend, with its telegraph rest-house, the most spacious yet met with *en route*, lies at the foot of the hills. There are no fresh horses to be had here, the Mejliss deputies having passed through only the day

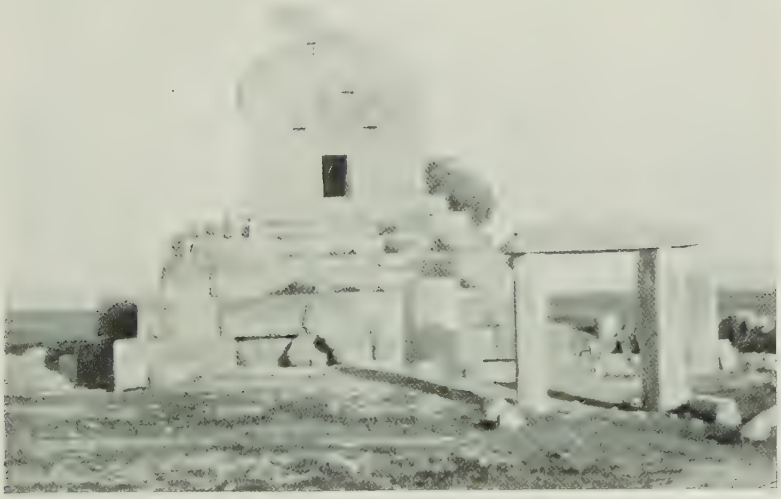
before and cleared the stables. It needs much persuasion to induce the coachman to take on the same horses for another dâk. Fortunately, however he is more amenable to a bribe than the post-driver, and we are soon once more on the road approaching what is perhaps, next to Persepolis, the most interesting place along the whole route—the ruins of Pasargardæ, the first capital of the Achæmenian kings, amongst which stands the tomb of Cyrus.

It is a long détour by the carriage road which, always ascending and winding through a narrow gorge, brings one at last to the caravanserai of Kurdshul, on the edge of the plain of Murghab. From there it is a walk of some two miles across the fields, cut up by innumerable watercourses, to the tomb of Cyrus, set at the furthest corner of the plain. There is something indescribably pathetic in its aspect as one approaches this wonderful survival of the past. The twenty-four hundred years that have passed since the great king was laid in his golden coffin in this last resting-place have left the outward fabric much as it must have looked when the funeral procession wended its way thither across the plain. But though it has survived, well nigh all else has perished. The tomb remains but its setting has changed beyond all recognition. Instead of a great city there is the bare unbroken plain, the few scattered monuments that have survived but serving to accentuate its emptiness. The direct riding road from Shiraz to Ispahan now runs within a hundred yards of the tomb itself, while the telegraph line stretches its unsightly length beside it. Close by is the miserable village of Madar-

i-Suleiman with its mud-walls and crazy roofs of thatch, mean and squalid even for a Persian village. Immediately surrounding the tomb is a Moslem graveyard, the gravestones as promiscuously scattered as if an earthquake had thrown them right and left. Among them, solid and substantial in the midst of the puny efforts of a later day, are the remains of pillars which evidently once formed a colonnade enclosing the tomb itself. It is a mean immediate setting for the last resting-place of one of the greatest kings of ancient days. Out beyond Nature has designed a far more fitting frame. Grandeur and the immensity of the handiwork, both of Nature and of man, had been the striking features of Persepolis. Here the works of man have met with a harsher fate even than the ruined columns and pillared halls on the Mervdasht plain, while Nature herself has struck a softer though not a less romantic note. Encircling the plain, rises range on range of hills, stretching away to the west and north to the far horizon, in long undulating slopes green and brown and grey in the light of the evening sun. Cyrus, when he chose this site for his first capital, showed the true Achæmenian appreciation of beauty and magnificence.

The tomb is a simple building of no architectural pretensions, constructed of enormous blocks of white limestone from the neighbouring hills. The pedestal on which it stands is forty-seven feet long by forty-four feet broad, and consists of seven tiers or flights of huge stone steps, some eighteen feet high. The stones were once clamped together with iron clamps, but these have long since disappeared. The mauso-

RUINS AT PASARGARDÆ.



THE TOMB OF CYRUS.

leum to which the steps give access is about the same height as the pedestal, and twenty-one feet long by seventeen feet wide, while so thick are the walls and roof that the actual space inside is only ten and a half feet long by seven and a half feet wide and seven feet high. It is with a strange feeling of reverence that one climbs the seven tiers of steps and enters through the low doorway the sepulchre of Cyrus after all the centuries that have passed. The very emptiness within is impressive. There is no sign of a great rock coffin as in the tombs at Naksh-i-Rustam. Two enormous blocks of stone polished till they shine like marble form the floor, while above the walls are blackened with smoke. On the walls is a modern Persian inscription with verses from the Koran, strangely out of place in the shrine of the great Zoroastrian king. Hung on a piece of string, stretched across from one corner of the tomb to the other, are a few pitiful votive offerings, bits of cloth and brass, a common tin chiragh, and many strips of paper placed here by the women who pass this way in the hope that by the intercession of the mother of Suleiman they may become the mothers of sons.

There is no trace now to be found of the epitaph that according to ancient writers once adorned the tomb. There was a splendid simplicity about it that accords well with the one that still survives on one of the ruined pillars of the plain. Alexander is said to have read the inscription when he visited the tomb, and to have ordered it to be recut in the Greek tongue. It ran: 'O thou whosoever thou art and whencesoever thou comest (for I know thou wilt come), I am Cyrus,

the founder of the Persian Empire. Grudge me not therefore this little earth that covers my body.'

The account of Alexander's visit to the tomb has been narrated by several ancient writers. Arrian, the Greek historian, who wrote some four hundred years after its occurrence, quotes Aristobulus, who was the companion of Alexander, an eye-witness of what he writes. This account of the famous visit makes curious reading now beside the once more despoiled and neglected tomb. Yet after his treatment of Persepolis it is good to know that Alexander respected and revered at least one greatness that was not his own: 'Alexander himself, with his lightest infantry and with his cavalry guard and some of his bowmen, marched towards Pasagardæ in Persia, and he was grieved at the insult inflicted upon the tomb of Cyrus, the son of Cambyses, seeing that he found the tomb of Cyrus broken open and despoiled, as Aristobulus tells us. For the latter says that there was in Persis, in the royal paradise, the tomb of that Cyrus. About it had been planted a grove of all kinds, and it was watered with streams, and deep grass had grown up in the meadow. The tomb itself in its lower parts had been wrought of squared stone in the form of a square; and above was a house upon it of stone, roofed, having a door that led within so narrow that hardly could one man, and he of no great stature, enter even with much difficulty. In the house was placed a golden coffin where the body of Cyrus was buried, and a couch beside the coffin. The feet of the couch were of hammer-beaten gold, and it had a coverlet of Babylonian tapestries and thick carpets

of purple were strewn beneath it, and there was also upon it a tunic and other garments of Babylonian workmanship. He says further that Median cloths and purple dyed vestments were placed there (and some of these were of purple and some of other colours) and collar chains and swords and earrings of gold inlaid with stones, and a table was placed there. And in the middle of the couch was placed the coffin which held the body of Cyrus. And there was within the enclosure, hard by the ascent that led to the tomb, a small house that had been made for the Magi who guarded the tomb of Cyrus from the time of Cambyses the son of Cyrus to now, father handing down the guardianship to son. To these a sheep was given every day from the king and fixed measures of flour and wine and a horse every month for sacrifice to Cyrus. And the tomb was inscribed with Persian characters, and they said in Persian as follows: 'O man, I am Cyrus, the son of Cambyses, who founded the Empire of Persia and was King of Asia. Grudge me not therefore this monument.

'Alexander (for it had been an object of great care to him, when he should take Persia, to come to the tomb of Cyrus) found all the other things carried away save only the coffin and the couch. Nay, they had outraged the very body of Cyrus, having carried off the lid of the coffin and had cast forth the corpse, and the coffin itself they had tried to make light of burden for themselves, and in this wise light to carry, cutting part of it in pieces and battering part of it in. But when this work of theirs did not fare well, then they had left the coffin and gone. And Aristobulus says that he himself was appointed by

Alexander to adorn anew the tomb of Cyrus and to put back such parts of the body as still remained in the coffin, and to put the lid upon it, and to replace such parts of the coffin as had been injured and to tie fillets upon the couch and to restore all the other things that had been placed here for adornment, both in number and likeness to those of old time, and to do away with the door by building it up with stone and plastering it over with mortar and to stamp upon the mortar the royal signet.'

It is a living sermon on the vanity of human greatness that this tomb of one of the greatest of the kings should now be popularly known among his countrymen by another and a fictitious name. The wave of Mahomedanism that swept away the Zoroastrian faith seems to have banished with it all memory of the mighty race of kings who held it. Ignoring the very fact of their existence, well nigh all their handiwork has been ascribed to others. So it comes that this tomb is known, not as that of the first and greatest Achæmenian king, but as the Kabr-i-Madar-i-Suleiman or the Musjid-i-Madar-i-Suleiman, the Tomb or Mosque of the Mother of Solimon. How it acquired this particular name or what connection the mother of the great king of Palestine can have had with the Murghab plain in the heart of Persia it is impossible even to conjecture. Yet this extraordinary tradition has become so firmly fixed that the tomb is known by no other name, the great platform on the further side of the plain being also known only as the Takht-i-Suleiman, the Throne of Solimon. Such is the irony of fate that Mahomedan graves have now gathered close around this

Zoroastrian tomb as round a shrine, while Mussalman women hang their votive offerings within the sanctuary itself. Yet despoiled, neglected, and misnamed the tomb itself stands on, still eloquent to him to whom it is given to understand of a greatness long since dead.

Only five other remains of the once great city of Cyrus are still standing on the Murghab plain. Most interesting of all, if indeed it represents the king himself, is the famous winged figure carved on an enormous block of stone some eleven and a half feet high. So badly have recent years treated it, after the centuries it has survived, that even less than a hundred years ago an inscription was to be read upon the upper portion of it which has since been broken off. The inscription was prouder in its simplicity than all the grandiloquent ones of the later Achæmenian kings at Persepolis. In the original it consisted of only four words: 'I am Cyrus the King, the Achæmenian.' The figure carved in relief upon the stone is more than life-size, and the most curious part of it is the double pair of wings that spring from the shoulders, two of them rising upwards in the conventional fashion, but the remaining two sweeping downwards to the ground. The figure is in profile with right hand uplifted, and on the head is a symbolical Egyptian crown. The fact of the Egyptian crown gives some probability to the suggestion that the bas-relief was executed after the death of Cyrus, by his Egyptian wife Nitetis, the mother of Cambyses, his successor. Close by stood what was probably once a royal palace or hall of audience, of which only the platform, now level with

the plain, and the bases of twelve pillars in two rows of six each still survive.

The ruins of what is generally supposed to have been the chief royal palace, however, stand a hundred and fifty yards further off across the plain. The oblong paved space was once enclosed by walls, but all that now remains are three angle-piers, each bearing engraved upon it the same simple yet proud inscription, 'I am Cyrus the King, the Achæmenian.' In the centre of the pavement there stands a single unfluted column, thirty-six feet high and three and a half feet in diameter, the sole survivor of its fellows. Only the bases of eight other columns still remain, with the lower broken portions of two doorways, which from the feet of the figures that are still visible, it is evident, were decorated with bas-reliefs as at Persepolis.

The next ruin is a solitary plinth composed of three blocks of enormous stones, nearly twenty feet high and hollowed at the back as if to give place for an adjoining wall. There is nothing to show of what building this single monolith once formed a part, though that it once helped to support a roof is clear from the hollowed spaces near its summit. Across its face, high up, is the same cuneiform inscription in three languages: 'Adam Kurush Khshayathiya Hakhamanishiya,' 'I am Cyrus the King, the Achæmenian.'

The fifth ruin, three hundred yards further north, consists only of a portion of a wall, that once formed part of a building that must have almost exactly resembled the square structure at Naksh-i-Rustam round the origin and uses of which so much con-

troversy has raged. Although by most writers regarded as a fire temple, it appears far more probable that it was a mausoleum, and it may possibly, as some have conjectured, have once contained the body of Cambyses, father of Cyrus. The little that remains of this once solid structure is in the last stages of decay, most of the stones, even in recent years, having been carried away by the neighbouring villagers to strengthen their mud-built hovels. Less than a hundred years ago there were portions of all four walls still standing; now there is no trace of three and only a small portion of the fourth remaining. Where the rest of the building once stood there is now nothing but the fresh green turf of the Murghab plain, and the flocks and herds of the villagers feed round the silent monolith all unconscious and uncomprehending its significance. Of a wonderful marble whiteness, it is like some ghostly relic of the past fast dwindling and disappearing in the light of later days.

Furthest away from the tomb, on the other side of the plain, stands the great platform which was doubtless designed like that at Persepolis to support the audience hall of the great king. But unlike its greater successor on the Mervdasht plain, this platform crowns the summit of a hill, and thus adds to its naturally imposing appearance by its commanding situation above the plain. The platform, however, is on a far smaller scale, some three hundred feet long by fifty feet broad and thirty-eight feet high. It is composed of fourteen layers of enormous blocks of limestone so beautifully cut and fitted that no mortar was ever used, and they were simply held

together by iron clamps. In many places, though the clamps have been long since torn away, the stones are as perfectly fitted as when placed there by the workmen two thousand four hundred years ago, with the masons' signs still clearly visible. Had many of the stones not been wantonly torn away to be put to baser uses, this magnificent platform would have remained to-day as perfect as when the great king raised it.

There are no traces of any building ever having stood on the platform, and there is no staircase leading to it, access being gained from the side by the slope of the rock on which it stands. It may be that in these early days the King of Kings was content with this great rock throne where he might show himself to his people beneath a canopy of cloth of gold and purple. Standing on this magnificent height all the plain of Murghab lies spread out before one's gaze. Fertile and well watered, fifteen miles long by nine miles broad and strongly set in its circle of surrounding hills, there is small wonder that it appealed to Cyrus as a fitting spot whereon to place the first capital of his newly founded kingdom. But there was another association which must have endeared it to the King of Kings. It was on this same plain that he won his first great victory, the beginning of a long series of triumphs that set him among those whom history for all time has surnamed the Great.

Looking out over the plain, one pictures in imagination that first great scene. Cyrus, with the strong man's courage, is staking all upon this contest with Astyages the Mede, and making sure of his

position awaits upon the Murghab plain the coming of the Median hosts. To the south the hills are crowded with the women and children of his army, posted out of harm's way and watching with all the intensity of life or death the issue of the day. Up from Ecbatana comes at last the vast army of the Medes, and soon the whole plain is one great sea of struggling men. To and fro the battle ebbs and flows like a tide, and for long hours the clash of arms goes up to heaven. Watching from the height, it is the cry of the women and children that first heralds the victory of the Achæmenian king, and swiftly, as the defeated hosts are driven backward, they hasten down to greet their kindred and claim their share of spoil. There were many victories and many conquests to follow, but to this the scene of his first great triumph Cyrus returned in later days to build the first royal city of his race, and at last to rest in his golden coffin in the tomb that he had built overlooking the plain he loved.

Reluctantly leaving the ruins of the great city as the sun sets, one traces one's way across the fields and many watercourses back to the caravanserai at Kurdshul. The old man who has so inadequately played the part of guide lags suddenly behind, and looking round one sees that he has knelt in the midst of the way to pray at sunset. Rising and kneeling he performs his evening worship, totally oblivious of the fact that one is waiting for him to act as guide amidst the maze of watercourses. It is all typical of Persia—the wide open plain shut in by the encircling hills, and the broad expanse destitute of all sign of human life save the kneeling figure absorbed in prayer. The

gathering darkness falls like a shroud, chill and grey, in one dark, lowering bank of cloud unlit by a brightening beam from the setting sun. Only over the tomb of Cyrus a golden cloudlet hovers, gilding it anew with its fleeting glory ere night closes in on hill and plain.

CHAPTER XIII

THROUGH DEHBID AND YEZDIKHAST TO ISPAHAN

The moon is up, and it is almost as clear as day again, with the marvellous clearness that only a Persian moonlight sheds, before we have once more taken the road. It is a fascinating drive of ever-changing interest and adventure across ploughed fields and over watercourses, down deep crevices and up steep banks, among huge boulders where there is no sign of a road, and along the edges of steep ravines at the bottom of which, far below like a silver thread, runs the winding line of the Polvar river. It is a constant cause for marvel that the wheels of the carriage are not wrenched off, or that the whole match-box concern does not bodily collapse. But gaily, in spite of many a hairbreadth escape, we pass on, though with many a fervent 'Allahu Akbar' from Jaffir Khan.

It is with something of a shock of surprise that one awakes suddenly to find oneself alone in the carriage, horses and men alike having disappeared inside the walled village outside which we have come to a halt. So conducive to sleep had been the open air and the swinging of the carriage that, in spite of the badness of the road, one had fallen asleep so soundly that even the cessation of motion and the usual stir of arrival had not awakened one. It is

an extraordinary scene to open one's eyes upon. Behind lies the limitless plain, bare and brown, with a mass of hills against the sky-line. Close by is a walled-in garden, and beside it an open graveyard of many graves, while in front stand the great turreted gateway and the high mud-walls of the sleeping village, shut in like a fort against attack. Over all is the brilliant moonlight, making the night as clear as the day, as it wraps the silent world in its soft and kindly radiance. Much shouting at last brings out the watchman, a quaint bearded figure huddled in his long enveloping blanket coat, and further search within the gateway discovers Jaffir Khan in heated controversy with the new driver, who is declaring with suspicious insistence that he has no horses fit to travel. There are four, it is true, in the stable, but they cannot possibly take the saheb on since one of them is dead lame. Hauled out of the stable for our inspection, this proves to be only too true; but when we declare our intention of getting on as best we can with the other three the objection is at once urged that there is no harness. Once again the Mejliss deputies have been just before us, and again one is not disposed to call down blessings upon this first attempt at constitutional government. The previous driver, who had already brought us two stages, had discreetly hurried off with his horses on the homeward way before one awoke, doubtless determined that neither bribe nor force should induce him to go further. There is nothing for it but to send a man on to the next stage to hurry up the returning horses and to make oneself as comfortable as possible in the carriage for the night.

With the morning there are still no horses. At dawn the closed gates of the village open and out rushes pell-mell a stream of donkeys, goats, and ponies, frisking and kicking with joy at being released from their cramped quarters of the night. Later the villagers themselves come out to lounge about the gateway and smoke the morning pipe. The stranger and his carriage form unexpected topics of conversation and amusement. The carriage looks a greater wreck than ever in the morning light with an old red blanket of Jaffir's stretched across the gap, where the hood is broken, to keep out the cold by night and the sun by day. Further appeal to the driver proves useless: either there is no harness or he is determined not to make the journey with only three horses. So the day drags on and still no relief comes. Most annoying of all is the thought that unless the horses returning from the dâk ahead soon arrive, the post-wagon which we had only left behind with such difficulty at Puseh will soon be upon us again, with a probable renewal of the struggle for the horses when they finally do arrive. But after a long day of waiting the sun goes down and finds us still stranded outside the walled village of Kudra-bad, with the post-wagon not yet in sight. All through the night, bitterly cold in the draughty carriage, we hope on for the relief that never comes. Once again the gates of the village open at dawn and the daily round begins. Still there is no sign of the messenger despatched to the next stage to hurry up the horses, and one begins to suspect that, in spite of the promised *inam*, he has never set out at all.

At last about eleven o'clock that which we had feared happens, and the post-wagon heaves in sight. The post-driver, however, greets us with no show of ill-feeling, and after much persuasion actually consents to our taking on his horses for the next stage after a two hours' rest. It is a great and unexpected relief, as there is still no sign of other horses returning from the stage beyond. But after the two hours' rest the coachman proves fractious, and there seems likely to be further difficulty. After a thirty-six hours' wait, however, one is not in the mood to suffer further delay gladly. Jaffir again proves invaluable and the horses are soon brought from the stable, in spite of the coachman's protests, and harnessed to the carriage without his help. The whole village quickly gathers to watch the start under such adverse conditions. Fortunately it is not a hostile crowd, being quite content, with true Persian apathy, to await the result without interference ; and it is only after many appeals and the offer of a considerable bribe that we are able to secure a driver in place of the coachman, who washes his hands of us and absolutely refuses to mount the box. A youth of eighteen or nineteen is finally pressed into the service, his capabilities all unknown but vouched for by the post-driver, who remains friendly to the end.

So at last we are off from Kudrabad with much joy after a thirty-six hours' delay. The manner of our going is anything but dignified. The driver, only persuaded by sheer force at the last moment from deserting his post, seems to have no control whatever over the horses at the start, and we make a wild charge straight for the open graveyard and

career madly over the tombs, each one of the long flat slabs seeming as if it would wrench the wheels from the carriage as they bump over it. A mile beyond the village there is a steep ascent, necessitating the help of half a dozen men to push the carriage up, so the villagers had declared; but there are only three of us and the ascent must needs be made. By running oneself in front holding the reins while Jaffir and the driver urge on the horses and push from behind, ready with large stones to put beneath the wheels to prevent them running back down hill, and with many a pause by the way, we finally reach the top, hot, breathless, and exhausted but triumphant. There with much joy we at last lose sight of Kudrabad and turn our faces northward.

The road is if possible worse than before, or it may be that the previous two days' journey has told upon the carriage, which creaks and groans as if in protest at every bump. But still, in imminent danger of the breakdown which fortunately never comes, we tear along, the new driver, one could almost imagine, intent upon our complete undoing and destruction in return for having pressed him into our service against his will. Half way towards the next stage at Hajjiabad we meet the post-wagon from Ispahan and change horses, the new ones being fortunately far fresher than our own. The rest of the stage runs through one long valley, the whole of it broken by curious natural earthworks that look like the remains of some vast encampment of the olden days. Not a sign of life or human habitation is to be seen from end to end of the valley, save in the far corner where a fort-like building stands out against the sky. It is

a rugged, picturesque scene, its wild and desolate beauty enhanced by the setting sun which is rapidly falling behind the western hills. Away to the right the peaks are clothed in a glorious purple haze, rich and warm, while far ahead a range stands out a marvellous deep blue, snow-capped and framed against the fast paling sky of yellow and gold. Ahead lies mile on mile of drab grey plain, void of all life, a vast encampment that Nature has designed but found as yet no time to wake to life.

At Hajjiabad, a walled village that stands out solitary and wind-swept on the plain, there is another delay, for again there are no more horses. Those we have brought have just done sixteen miles at a stretch and Dehbid, the next halting-place, lies twenty miles away. So a halt is called for three hours to give them rest. It is sunset and all the village turns out to watch the new arrival. Sitting outside in the carriage it is bitterly cold, but a look inside the village, which is nothing more than a square open space with houses built all round it, where men, women, and children apparently herd promiscuously with the beasts, does not tempt one to stay, in spite of the crackling fires that here and there gleam out of the gathering dusk. All the cattle of the village are being driven in from pasture, a small boy, mounted, chasing them across the plain, till suddenly their leader makes a dash for the narrow gateway, and the whole troop gallops through, jostling one another in their eager haste to get within. One by one the villagers, too, turn in and the gateway closes. Once more the glory of moon and stars holds all the world in thrall.

The driver is commendably true to his promise, and within four hours we are on the way again. This is the coldest drive of the whole journey, and a thick resai, two rugs, a long covert driving-coat, and a shooting-cape altogether fail to keep out the keen cutting air. It is one long ascent, the same rough road over bare, almost uninhabited country, to Dehbid, the Place of the Willows, some seven thousand five hundred feet above sea-level. It is the highest point yet reached since leaving Bushire, and reported to be the coldest inhabited place in all Persia. The telegraph quarters look picturesque in the brilliant moonlight, the tall white chenar-trees that tower above them just in bud, and the cherry-trees white with blossom beneath. So dazzling is the moonlight that the whole village and hillside look as if clothed in the first faint layer of new fallen snow.

It is a close-shut sleeping village, and it takes much shouting to rouse the telegraph master, who, awake at last, hospitably invites us into his own quarters, and soon has alight a blazing fire of logs and a welcome cup of tea to warm us. It is a neat little interior, kept evidently with a certain pride, the saucers clean and bright, and a couple of sheepskin rugs spread before the fire giving it an air of comfort. On the walls it is somewhat surprising to find cheap prints of the Queen of Holland and the Prince Consort of the Netherlands. The telegraph master, a tall dignified personage, with typical Persian courtesy smiles as one points them out, and speaks of them as the gift of an unknown stranger who passed that way a year ago.

There is little beyond of actual interest at Dehbid. An artificial mound of earth is said by tradition to have been raised by the Zoroastrians in the old days of the Achæmenian kings when the fire worship flourished, before the coming of Mahomedanism. Another tradition, however, gives it the name of Gumbaz-i-Bahur, and states that on this site stood one of the eight shooting-towers of that great hunter and national hero Bahram Gur. It is the nomad tribes who frequent the upland plains around Dehbid who give this country its chief interest. Perhaps in no other country in the world has the gipsy spirit survived to the same extent as in the Persia of to-day. These vast expanses of almost untenanted hill and valley furnish ideal camping grounds, offering sustenance without labour to enormous companies of men and flocks and herds so long as they are content to move on continually to fresh pastures. Almost all the nomad tribes belong to the province of Fars, and the road from Ispahan to Shiraz cuts straight across their summer haunts. Many of them are Turkish Lurs, so called because there is a tradition that they are descended from a company brought from Kashgar by the Mongol Hulaku Khan. The principal tribe is that of the Kashkais, whose winter home is in the plains of Laristan, where they engage in cultivation on a small scale, depending, however, chiefly on their immense flocks and herds, with which they move in summer towards the uplands that border the Ispahan road for hundreds of miles on either side. They were formerly great breeders of horses, and derived considerable wealth from their flocks and herds, but the Persian Government has recently awakened to

the fact that these wandering tribes may provide a far more profitable source for taxation than has been hitherto realised. Their chief, known as the Ilkhani, with his second in command, the Ilbegi, collect the revenue which is levied in the shape of a poll-tax on the flocks and herds. The Persian Government has latterly adopted the policy of calling the chieftains of the various tribes to Teheran and keeping them from time to time in honourable attendance at the Court, as hostages for the good behaviour of the tribe and faithful payment of the revenue.

Beyond Dehbid the road gradually begins to descend, but with many ups and downs before it finally reaches Khan-i-Khoreh. Here there is nothing but a caravanserai, a cluster of huts, and the post-house. On again, a long level stretch of sandy plain leads to a further descent, bringing one as day breaks to the village of Surmek, in the midst of the desert. It is one of the largest villages yet reached, and the headman, Khusru Khan, comes out to welcome the new arrival and offer the hospitality of his house while the horses are being put in. It is an unexpectedly clean and well-built house for a village *en route*, set in the midst of a garden of cypress and willow and elm, and watered by many rivulets, reminding one again of the gardens of Shiraz. Beyond Surmek the drive is literally between 'the Desert and the Sown.' On one side of the long valley stretch immense tracts of cultivation, giving a welcome touch of civilisation which the road has so long lacked. Nearer Abadeh the cultivation increases and numerous walled gardens give

the valley an unaccustomed air of habitation and prosperity.

Abadeh is a town of considerable importance, famed throughout Persia and beyond for its exquisite and unique wood-carving. The chief articles produced are the *kashuks* or sherbet spoons, of deep boat-like shape, which are in general use throughout the country. They are made of pear or box wood grown in the neighbourhood, and are produced in enormous numbers by the skilful Abadeh workmen. They are beautifully fashioned, the handles being exquisitely designed filigree work, and the bowls of the spoons hollowed out almost to transparency from a single piece of wood. Though each requires an immense amount of labour and skill, the price is extraordinarily modest even to the stranger, who doubtless pays many times their local value. They are difficult, however, to transport, since, being of such brittle wood and fine workmanship, they are extremely liable to break. Besides the spoons, small boxes of all sorts are produced, the carvings being executed on thin strips of wood, which are then glued on to the boxes previously prepared. Many of the carvings are regular works of art, representing faithfully whole scenes, such as the rock tablets at Shapur and Naksh-i-Rustam. It is fascinating to watch the men at work in the open shops, which are scenes of constant activity, an apparently limitless supply of spoons and box panels being turned out daily.

There was one other temporary point of interest that Abadeh held for us. Outside the post-house stood the three conveyances of the Mejliss deputies.

Although they had started two days in front of us, and in spite of our delays, they had reached no further on the road than this. They formed a curious group as they stood gossiping around the post-house. There was nothing striking or remarkable about any of them. They might have been any of the middle-class Shirazis whom one had seen in hundreds along the public roads outside Shiraz when the heat of the day was over and the citizens took their airing. Not one of them looked the part of a revolutionary leader even of a constitutional kind, and, except as the first members of the famous Mejliss representing the important city of Shiraz, they failed to arouse the smallest interest. It was with much joy that we left them behind at Abadeh. Henceforward along the road there was no difficulty about horses, there being an adequate supply at every stage.

The next halting-place is at Shulgistan, after a heavy drive over a barren sandy plain that stretches far away on the right, but ends abruptly on the left in one long range of hills. In Shulgistan there is little of interest save a caravanserai built by Shah Abbas, now in ruins, and an imamzadeh erected over the grave of Mahomed, son of the Imam Zein-el-Abidin, its first beauty, however, long since tarnished, and the glory of its green-tiled cupola long since departed. Beyond, again, lies one vast expanse of plain.

There have been many curious natural formations of hill and rock and plain *en route*, but there is assuredly none more curious than that we are now approaching. It is the famous city of Yezdikhast,

built on a rock in the centre of the plain, yet isolated from it by a deep gorge on either side. Standing on a level with the plain, it looks, as one approaches, nothing more than another of the many flat-roofed villages already encountered on the road, and it is not until one gets within a few hundred yards that its extraordinary position is gradually disclosed. Suddenly the plain comes to an end, as if on the bank of a river, and there is a sheer drop of over a hundred feet to the bottom of a gorge below. The width of the gorge is over two hundred yards, and on the further side the plain begins again on the same level as before. It is as if there had been some vast upheaval of the earth's surface and the ground had opened and left this enormous fissure agape for all time. As far as one can see it extends on either side, and it is said that a road runs along it a three days' journey to Yezd. At the bottom of it runs a shallow stream, and as one looks down at it from above it seems as if it must once have been a mighty river which has sunk and dwindled to these insignificant proportions, leaving the enormous banks above as evidence of its breadth and depth in days gone by. But the most extraordinary phenomenon is the long narrow strip of rock that rises in the centre of the gap. It is some three hundred and fifty yards in length and towers up from the bottom of the river-bed to a level with the plain. On the top of this enormous rock island is built the village of Yezdikhast, in tier on tier of houses that rise to a height of a hundred and thirty feet above the river-bed. So close packed are they that the verandahs of many of them actually jut out over

YEZDIKHAST.

the side of the rock, hanging by what looks like only the frailest of supports over the yawning precipice below. It is assuredly the most curiously situated village in the world. Viewed from below the houses, perched precariously on the summit, look like enormous birds of the air that have alighted on the rock, or again by moonlight the whole looks like some great ship afloat, the houses above like sails set in the breeze. Above, in the village itself, the villagers live at a giddy height, though so accustomed are they to their exalted quarters that they pursue their daily avocations with unconcern, while the children play in the hanging verandahs regardless of the yawning drop below. At the foot, cut out of the solid rock, are the stables, where the villagers herd their flocks.

There is no entrance save by a narrow foot-bridge, built to connect it with the northern bank, the entrance at the further end being only a small doorway in the face of the rock. It thus occupied in olden days an almost impregnable position against attack. To-day a modern gun would make short work of it from either bank, but in the days of mediæval warfare it was practically unassailable, and could only be reduced by a protracted siege until the villagers were starved into surrender. It was well called Yezdikhast, 'God willed it.' Many a time it has successfully defended itself against attack, but the most famous scene in all its history occurred in the year 1779. Kerim Khan, the great viceroy of Fars, was dead, and his half-brother Zeki Khan, as brutal and tyrannical as Kerim Khan was wise and just, had assumed the sovereignty.

Marching against his nephew Ali Murad Khan, he came to Yezdikhast, and its inhabitants having sided with his rival, he ordered them to be thrown down one by one from the top of the rock into the bed of the river below. Until eighteen had perished the work of destruction continued, but when the turn of the nineteenth came, and he proved to be a seyid of much repute, whose wife and daughter had already been handed over to the soldiery, even Zeki Khan's own followers showed their disgust and compelled him to desist. That same night vengeance overtook the tyrant, and even his own attendants turning against him, they cut the ropes of his tent, which fell upon him, and the villagers rushing in completed the work of destruction. So late as 1818 Sir Ker Porter, when at Yezdikhast, actually found alive and conversed with the sole survivor of those who had been hurled down from the summit of the rock. Though wounded and broken by the fall, he had survived the tragedy nearly forty years.

Climbing the northern bank, the road runs on across the open plain and the frontier between Fars and Irak (Persia Proper) to Aminabad the Abode of Safety. Here a large fort-like caravanserai was originally built by Daud Khan as a protection for travellers against the Bakhtiari marauders, who in days gone by were a constant source of terror along all this road. It is still by repute the most dangerous spot between Ispahan and Shiraz, and only a few months before a party of Europeans had been waylaid and robbed, being left, stripped of all valuables and severely beaten, on the roadside. There is no sign of cultivation even now, no one

venturing to sow with so little hope of reaping on this plain of ill-repute. Beyond lies Maksud Begi, another walled village, and Kisharin, lying in a hollow beside the road. Here we change horses with no delay and pass on again to the open plain and the scene of one of the few battles fought on Persian soil since ancient times. It was after the death of Fath Ali Shah and Mahomed Shah's succession was disputed by his two uncles the Firman Firma, Governor-General of Fars, and his brother the Shuja-es-Sultaneh. Sir Lindsay Bethune was in charge of the army of the Shah, which numbered no more than four thousand men. The rebels far outnumbered the royal forces, but the English commander, with his artillery, proved to the latter a tower of strength. The mist which hangs much over the plain in the early morning hid the opposing forces, but the accidental firing of a gun in the rebel ranks enabled the royalist army to locate their whereabouts, and taking them by surprise it quickly put them to flight. Thence Sir Lindsay Bethune marched on to Shiraz and taking the Firman Firma and the Shuja-es-Sultaneh prisoners sent them to Teheran, thus putting a speedy end to the rebellion.

Beyond lies Kumeshah, a large town of many tortuous narrow streets, containing a telegraph station and a flourishing bazaar. It is full of picturesque scenes, a jumble of walls and turrets and gateways all in a state of decay, the principal entrance to the town itself half ruined, the enormous doorway unhinged and rapidly falling into disuse. Outside the road winds through a long broad valley, then again

emerges on the open plain. For miles the track across the sand runs on, a flat unbroken road, its only interest its vastness and the glory of sunset closing in upon it. Then comes Mayar and a change of horses, and here for the first time one sees one of the pigeon-houses which are so familiar a sight in Ispahan and its immediate neighbourhood. They are enormous circular houses like towers, often decorated with mosaics with a curious round top, like a chimney emerging from the flat roof. They look like enormous scent-bottles, gaily coloured, and make a delightful addition of form and colour to the landscape. Inside they are honeycombed with pigeon-holes and formerly they were tenanted by thousands of pigeons, though now round most of them there is no sign of life to be seen. Beyond Mayar lies a steep climb known as the Kotal-i-Urchin, the Pass of the Stairway, with a descent on the further side to Marg, the last post-station on the road to Ispahan. A little beyond, on the crest of the Kuh-i-Suffa, a magnificent view is obtained. Below lies the old-time capital of Persia, with its suburb of Julfa, separated from it by the Zendeh Rud, and its domes and minarets sparkling against the darker background of its wealth of trees, the whole set in a vast expanse of plain flanked on every side by range on range of hills. It is a magnificent panorama and a doubly welcome sight after a three hundred and twenty miles' journey over hill and plain in a carriage that threatened to break down at every turn of the wheels. It is with many an inward congratulation that one finally descends the hill and enters Ispahan by way of the tortuous streets of Julfa.

ON THE ROAD.

INSIDE THE WALLED CITY OF KUMESHAH, NEAR ISPAHAN.

CHAPTER XIV

ISPAHAN

Julfa, the suburb, lies wholly apart from Ispahan. Separated by the broad stream of the Zendeh Rud, they are as different in character as two cities well could be. Ispahan will live for all time as once the capital of all Persia, the city of mosques and palaces that have had their day, those among them that still survive remaining only as pathetic reminders of a greatness that has long since passed. In its splendour and in its decay Ispahan is typically Persian. Julfa, on the other hand, has always been a city apart, a busy thriving commercial city with no beautiful building save its cathedral to adorn it, where a little colony of Christians, despised and persecuted by the greater city across the Zendeh Rud, has yet thrived and prospered, holding its own until the end in spite of overwhelming odds.

The approach to Julfa, which is as carefully walled as some mud-built village of the open plains, lies down the steep side of the Kuh-i-Suffa. At its foot the road runs through an enormous open cemetery, the gravestones lying scattered on either side as if thrown down promiscuously in no set form or order. Beneath them many generations of Armenians have been laid to rest, and here, too, lie

most of the Europeans who have died in Ispahan. Among them all perhaps the best known is that of Ralph or Rudolf Stadler, one of that very small company of Europeans who in past days have found fame and fortune in the heart of Persia. A Swiss watchmaker by trade, he found his way to Ispahan in search of adventure early in the seventeenth century, and there gained great favour in the eyes of Shah Sefi I., who greatly delighted in his skill and workmanship. He was soon destined, however, to experience the fickleness of royal favour, and was eventually put to death by the same monarch, it is said, on account of his refusal to become a Mahomedan. Above his grave runs the inscription '*Cy git Rodolfe*' which the Armenians of his day placed to his memory, raising him to something of the dignity of a saint for his adherence to the faith.

Inside, through one of the many gateways, the city is a maze of alleys, some few of them admitting the passing of a carriage, but most of them narrow and shut in by wooden doorways through which one can only pass on foot or horseback. It is a collection of walled cities within a walled city. Down the centre of some of the streets runs a double row of trees, of willows and poplars, fresh with all the verdure of spring, while between them runs in a shallow aqueduct a clear and sparkling stream. Along the pathways, instead of the shrinking figures of the Shirazi women, shrouded from head to foot in heavy black, gay figures in spotless white *chadars* and red skirts pass with firm and confident tread, concealing part of the nose and mouth and chin, but leaving the upper part of the face entirely free, and revealing

here and there about their garments the flash of silver ornaments. The children, rosy-cheeked and cheery, play with unoriental merriment and activity beside the road, gay in bright pinafores of calico and print. Even the houses, though shut in here as elsewhere, show greater character and variation than in any other Persian town yet seen, the great doorways with their bells and knockers bearing something of an English look.

The history of Julfa is almost entirely the history of the little colony of Armenians who for the last three hundred years have peopled it. Of its earlier days nothing but tradition survives. Here once stood that portion of the city of Ispahan known as Jei or Gabae, and here according to the legend was born Kavi the Blacksmith, that popular hero of Persian folklore. It was he who overthrew Zohak the Tyrant of Babylon. The latter in the legend figures as an ogre, from whose body grew two serpents that demanded each day the brains of children for their food. The two sons of Kavi the Blacksmith were at last seized for this purpose by the tyrant's minions, and their father, vowing vengeance, raised the standard of revolt, taking as an ensign his leather apron hoisted upon a spear. With his own hand he overthrew and slew the tyrant, and the ensign that he had carried, the leather apron upon a spear, was later on the national emblem, and brought back to the birthplace of Kavi the Blacksmith to remain for centuries its most cherished possession. So runs the legend.

It was not till 1604 that the Armenians first settled here. The great Shah Abbas, fighting

against the Turks on his north-west frontier, heard and saw something of their industry and prosperity at Julfa on the Araxes, and recognising their fitness to increase the commercial spirit of his beloved capital at Ispahan, he transported a colony of them to a new Julfa beside the Zendeh Rud. Under the privileges that he granted them they rapidly grew into a thriving community. Though viewed with jealousy and dislike by the Ispahanis their prosperity continued under the wise rule of Shah Abbas until twenty years later their little community numbered no less than ten thousand souls. The cathedral of St. Joseph, which is still the pride and glory of Julfa, was begun in 1605, Shah Abbas showing himself so little of the bigot that he even encouraged this building to the honour of an alien faith. It is a splendid edifice, its domes and belfries rising high above the flat-roofed houses of the suburb. Inside it is covered with a blaze of mosaics and paintings from floor to dome. The paintings represent Old Testament scenes, above being the hosts of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, while below are lurid pictures of the lost being conducted to hell by monsters and terrifying representations of evil. They are said to have been the gift of a wealthy Armenian merchant who, having travelled in Italy, had been much struck with the exquisite paintings that adorn the churches there. It was only, however, with some difficulty that he persuaded his co-religionists in Julfa to consent to so great an innovation, while the subjects of the pictures in which the human form is freely depicted were a great scandal to the

Mahomedans of the day. Stained-glass windows high up in the walls throw a subdued light upon the brilliant scene, checking to softer tints the medley of colour and Oriental splendour.

The first prosperity of Julfa was not destined to last long. It died almost with its founder, the great Shah Abbas. Succeeding monarchs looked with a jealous eye upon the wealth of its citizens, and at their instance the peaceable Armenian community, with no means of resistance, was robbed and oppressed without mercy by the royal tax-gatherers. Still worse misfortunes befell them under Shah Sultan Husein, the orthodox Mussalman, who issued an edict that the only penalty for a Mahomedan killing an Armenian should be the payment of a load of corn to the relatives of the deceased. Later Julfa shared with Ispahan in the dark days of the Afghan invasion, when both cities were overrun and partially destroyed. It was not until the days of Nadir Shah, however, that the misfortunes of the little Christian settlement reached their climax. That great conqueror's treatment of this small and politically insignificant community is inexplicable. On the obviously trumped-up charge that they had helped the Afghans against Ispahan, he seemed to take an insane delight in inflicting the most degrading penalties he could devise upon them, for bidding them even liberty of worship and social intercourse of any kind with their Mahomedan neighbours. Many who tried to escape his persecutions were brought back and cruelly tortured. It was not until his death, in 1747, that the opportunity of emigrating came to them, and no sooner had the hand of the

assassin removed the tyrant than they awaited no further events and hastened to quit their beloved Julfa for less bigoted lands, leaving but few of their number behind. From this great exodus the city has never even yet fully recovered, though it has always remained the mother city of the descendants of all those who set out from it, many of whom return every year, either temporarily or to spend their last days in this city of their dreams and of their faith.

Beside the Armenians, there is a considerable number of Christians of the Church of England Mission. Founded some forty years ago, it possesses a fine church capable of seating more than three hundred, which is slightly in excess of the number of baptised native Christians. Julfa is the headquarters of the Anglican Bishop in Persia, and the staff consists of two or three English clergymen as well as some thirty lay helpers, native and European. A well-supplied dispensary and hospital form a great addition to the mission, treating Mahomedans and Christians alike and earning an undying debt of gratitude from both.

It is some little distance beyond the gates of Julfa, along the river bank, before one reaches the great bridge of Ali Verdi Khan that spans the Zendeh Rud and leads straight into the heart of Ispahan. It is the finest of the five bridges that cross the river in the immediate vicinity, their number, their magnificence and the space they cover sufficient evidence of the greatness and extent of the city in days gone by. It is with something of surprise that one finds one of the finest and stateliest bridges in the world in Ispahan. Yet such the bridge of Ali Verdi Khan may well

claim to be. Built by the general of Shah Abbas after whom it is named, it is no less than three hundred and eighty-eight yards long, the width of the central roadway being ten yards. On either side there is a covered promenade two and a half feet wide in the thickness of the outer wall, while above is a platform or open promenade where in former days the Ispahanis took their airing in the cool of the day. The covered walk looks out both on to the river and on to the roadway through a series of ninety open niches on either side, while at intervals along their length are larger openings like small stone summer-houses where the passer-by may rest awhile, or the Ispahani, taking his evening stroll, linger for gossip by the way. Below this covered archway there is a vaulted passage running the full length of the bridge, thus giving a triple promenade to foot passengers. It is a charming vista as one walks along the centre of the roadway. At the further end, on the Ispahan side, beyond the ninety arches on either hand, stands a great stone gateway behind which lies the famous Avenue of the Chehar Bagh, the principal roadway of Ispahan. On either side, framed in the arches, are fascinating glimpses of the river rushing beneath, the banks on the further shore bright with gay-coloured chintzes spread in the sun to dry by the washermen, who seem for ever busy at their task. Beyond, another bridge spans the river, the banks on either side covered with a wealth of trees from which the tower-like pigeon-houses stand out in picturesque array. Nearer at hand across the river rise the blue domes and golden minarets of the great city.

On the Julfa side of the bridge of Ali Verdi

Khan once stretched a magnificent avenue along which behind a row of trees and running water stood the palaces of the nobility and the Court. For two and a half miles the avenue ran in one straight line from the Meidan-i-Shah, in the centre of Ispahan, across the bridge to the Hazar Jerib, or Park of a Thousand Acres, on the Julfa side. It was a marvellous pleasure-garden of terraces and stately pleasaunces, of shade and running water, while all round lay a park, the royal game preserve wherein the Sefavi kings hunted with all the state of Eastern monarchs. So severely has Ispahan suffered at the hands of time and man that no trace remains of this wonderful abode of kings, while of the grand avenue that led to it only sufficient survives to show what once has been.

Of the four other bridges that lead to Ispahan one lies higher up-stream than the bridge of Ali Verdi Khan and three below. Above is the oldest of all, the Pul-i-Marnun built by Shah Abbas in the sixteenth century, and once connecting with one of the finest suburbs of Ispahan by name Abbasabad, which has long since disappeared. Unlike the bridge of Ali Verdi Khan, which is uniform throughout its entire length, the Pul-i-Marnun is composed of arches of every shape and size, giving it a curiously irregular aspect when viewed from the bank. On the other side of the bridge of Ali Verdi Khan, some three hundred yards below it, is the Pul-Jubi, a plain stone bridge of fourteen arches, originally designed as an aqueduct to convey water to the famous Haft Dast Palace, which stood on the southern bank. Close by this bridge once stood the Guebristan, the

suburb of the Zoroastrians; and here too, in later days, stood the palace-harem of Abbas II., known as Sadetabad, the Abode of Felicity. Three hundred yards further down-stream is the Pul-i-Khaju, beside which the banks on either side were once covered with gardens. Here too by means of sluice-gates the river was dammed up so that it formed a lake upon which the king indulged in aquatic sports and recreation with the ladies of his harem, and which was illuminated on a magnificent scale on occasions of festivity and ceremony. The most famous of the buildings that stood upon the bank was the Haft Dast, the Seven Apartments, in one of which, in the midst of the palace and the city that he loved, died Fath Ali Shah in 1834. Close by it stood the Aineh-Khaneh, the Hall of Mirrors, so called from the glass panels that once adorned its walls and pillars. Of these nothing now remains even to mark the site. Neglected for many years until they had fallen into irremediable decay, they were finally pulled down in recent years and their place knows them no more. From all the accounts extant of distinguished visitors who from time to time were quartered there, they must have been some of the chief glories of Ispahan, yet with typical Persian unconcern and lack of appreciation the Ispahanis valued them so little that they allowed them to be wiped clean off the face of the earth.

The Pul-i-Khaju is a beautiful structure somewhat resembling the bridge of Ali Verdi Khan. It was built by Abbas II., and for long was the fashionable promenade of the Ispahanis. One hundred and fifty-four yards long with twenty-four main

arches and six hexagonal pavilions, two at each end and two in the centre, it is built upon a dam through which the water flows in narrow channels. Beneath the main causeway is a vaulted passage, crossing the channels by stepping-stones and running the full length of the bridge, steps descending from it to the river level. The main road itself is eight yards wide, and on either side is a covered gallery from which rows of high regular arches look from it out upon the river. The bridge is almost entirely deserted now of the throng that once passed along it in the days of Ispahan's prosperity, but once every year it still assumes something of its former life and gaiety. It is at the time of the sudden rising of the river, when the snows melt in the hills above. A shallow hurrying stream for the greater part of the year, it then suddenly rises into a foaming torrent, and rushing over the dam and through the causeway falls in a thousand cascades on the further side. This is one of the chief holidays of the year in Ispahan, and all the town flocks out to see the sight, sending up wild shouts of excitement and delight as the long-expected waters rush down and dash themselves against the dam. The last bridge is the Pul-i-Shehristan, now some miles away, but which in former days connected Ispahan with one of its most flourishing suburbs. Though much of the glory of Ispahan has departed, these five magnificent bridges still remain but little impaired by the passing of the years to tell the story of the one-time greatness of the capital of the Sefavi kings.

The bridge of Ali Verdi Khan is the only one that has retained its importance as a means of

communication to-day. Crossing it from the Julfa side and passing through the great gateway on the further bank, one emerges on the famous Chehar Bagh. It must once have been a magnificent avenue, 1350 yards long, leading direct to the royal palace which bordered on the Meidan-i-Shah, the heart and centre of Ispahan. Down the centre of the roadway in former days ran a channel of water, falling in terraces and collecting here and there in large shallow basins wherein fountains played. Beside the channel, on either side, was an avenue of trees and a paved footway for pedestrians. Beyond this, again, ran another avenue and a raised causeway for horses and vehicles against the flanking walls. Behind the walls lay the gardens and palaces of the king and his courtiers. On the right stood the imposing Madrasseh-i-Shah Husein, while at the further end a double-storied pavilion, connecting with the palace, furnished a coign of vantage whence the ladies of the royal harem might look down upon the gay and crowded promenade. Recent years have dealt hardly with the Chehar Bagh, but, shorn of half its glory as it is, it still forms a magnificent approach to the royal city. Half way up, on the right-hand side, still stands the Madrasseh-i-Shah Husein, or the Madrasseh-i-Mader-i-Shah as it is often called, its dome and flanking minarets a blaze of blue and gold. Built some two hundred years ago, it was originally intended as a retreat for religious mendicants, and all the art of the most skilful workmen of the day was lavished on its structure. From the roadway without there is nothing visible save high walls and dome and

minarets, covered with mosaics, and the great gateway cased in chased silver. Passing in beneath a deep recessed and elaborately carved archway, one enters a vestibule where, somewhat unexpectedly, a row of fruit and sweetmeat stalls lie spread to tempt the student and the constant stream of idlers passing in and out. Beyond lies the main courtyard, gay with flowers and planted with many trees that mirror themselves in the long basins of fresh clear water that fill all the remaining space. The splendid dome and minarets visible from without rise to the right above the open prayer-chamber, while all around the courtyard run arched cells for the students, forming ideal nooks for study and retreat. It is typical of the decay that has befallen this once splendid institution that the number of cells now far exceeds the number of pupils, and that, of the large number of those who daily throng the courts and lounge away the hours, but few come intent on prayer or study. The greatest glory of the Madrasseh, however, still remains. The mural decorations of mosque and courtyard are famous and richly deserve their fame, excelling anything of the kind to be seen in Persia. Round the base of the walls runs a wainscoting of Yezd marble, while, above, the arches and lintels and vaulted roofs are covered with exquisite tiles of enamelled arabesque, on which time and natural decay have as yet laid but the lightest hand. Their beauty remains well nigh as perfect as when their great designer first set them into place.

Beyond the Madrasseh-i-Shah is the entrance to the Hasht Behesht, the Garden of the Eight Paradises,

still a thing of joy and beauty with its central pavilion, once the pride of the Sefavi kings, situated far back within it. Pacing its cool avenues it is not difficult to conjure up again the scene when Shah Suleiman surrounded by his brilliant court, more than two centuries ago, came to look upon his finished handiwork and found that it was good; or later when Fath Ali Shah, revelling in the beauty of this Garden of the Nightingale, adorned the pavilion with many frescoes, most of them depicting his own royal person sitting in state among his courtiers or achieving some great feat of horsemanship. This Garden of the Eight Paradises once communicated with one of the royal palaces which lay beyond it, most of which has disappeared in recent years, its site a sad array of fallen brick and mortar.

The royal palaces and gardens that lay behind the Chehar Bagh were formerly of enormous extent. It is said that they were over four and a half miles in circuit, extending from the Meidan-i-Shah to the river and far away to the eastward. Many of the buildings have completely disappeared, others have been long since appropriated to baser uses, but a few still remain to show something of the beauty of the palace city in the great Sefavi days. Of them all the Chehal Situn, the Hall of Forty Pillars, first claims regard. It was the *talar*, the open throne-room of the palace, where the king in his majesty disclosed himself to his assembled people on days of audience or at the great festival of No Ruz. Originally built, like so much else in Ispahan, by Shah Abbas, it was almost completely destroyed by fire a hundred years later, being restored to its

present form by Shah Sultan Husein, who built the Madrasseh. In spite of its name there are only twenty pillars that support the open verandah. They run in four rows of three each and two rows of four each, supporting a flat roof composed of entire plane-trees, seven feet in diameter, which give it an appearance of immense solidity and strength. The back columns rest on stone lions facing outwards, and between the four central pillars once stood a marble basin filled with water, the lions acting as fountains on either side. The verandah faces an open garden, its pillars mirrored in an enormous oblong tank that stretches its length in front. Behind the verandah is the actual *talar*, or throne-room and on the daïs in the centre once stood the royal throne, doubtless hidden by a curtain until the moment of ceremony came when the king might stand revealed to his courtiers and his people. The decorations of walls and pillars and ceiling are marvellously preserved, fully exposed as they are to the open air. The mirror facets and panels, set in the blaze of colour painting, must have produced a truly regal setting for the monarch on his throne. Behind the *talar* three doorways open into the great hall, which is the only enclosed portion of the whole building. The roof is formed of three domes and the walls are almost entirely covered by six enormous oil paintings. These are extraordinarily well preserved and realistic, and though they lack much from an artistic point of view they are of the greatest interest, representing before one's eyes the very figures and manner of life of the Sefavi kings, their courtiers, and their rivals as they moved and feasted and fought in

THE HALL OF THE FORTY COLUMNS AT ISPAHAN.

MAKING A PERSIAN CARPET.

life. They give one glimpses of the past as nothing else could well do. Three of them represent scenes of conviviality such as the Sefavi kings loved. The most striking of them represents Shah Abbas and Abdul Mahomed Khan of the Uzbegs feasting together with every sign of conviviality. Behind are the courtiers and royal attendants, while around the two central figures, one of whom is holding out his cup for more wine, are seated the guests, one of whom has fallen on the floor, evidently in the last stages of intoxication, with a flask still raised to his lips. Another picture represents Shah Abbas II. entertaining Khalif Sultan, Ambassador from the Great Mogul. A company of musicians enlivens the feast, while dancing girls, complete abandonment in their attitudes, play upon castanets and tambourines. The three other pictures representing battle-scenes are in striking contrast. In one Shah Ismail leads his cavalry against the Uzbeg Tartars, while in another, the latest of all in date, Nadir Shah is shown triumphing over Sultan Mahomed, who is mounted on a white elephant, a triumph that lived in the victor's memory above all his triumphs, since with it came the fall of Delhi.

Passing through the garden that faces the Chehel Minar and through a narrow high-walled roadway we came to the famous Gate of Ali Kapi, which leads on to the Meidan-i-Shah. This was, in the olden days, the chief entrance to the palace precincts, and as such gave sanctuary to all who claimed refuge within its shadow. A chain is still stretched across the archway, behind which, even to-day, he who takes refuge has *bast*, and for the time at least is safe from

pursuit. So sacred was this sanctuary in former days that even the monarch himself could not seize the refugee and must needs force him to surrender by starving him out. The origin of the name Ali Kapi is variously given, sometimes as signifying Allah Kapi, the Gate of God, on account of its sanctity, sometimes as Ali Kapi, the Gate of Ali, there being a tradition that Shah Abbas brought it back as it stands from the grave of Ali at Meshed Ali on the Euphrates, and sometimes simply as Ali Kapi, the Sublime Porte. It is a fine archway with rooms on either hand, while above is an enormous verandah running its whole length and supported by twelve wooden columns. Here, as in the *talar* of the Chehel Situn, the King of Kings gave audience and watched the games of polo, the races, and the tournaments that took place on great occasions in the Meidan-i-Shah below.

It is this Meidan-i-Shah, the Royal Square, which is the chief glory of Ispahan. The Ispahanis may well boast that this is the finest piazza in the world, and assuredly there can be few public squares that can approach it in size and in the unique character of the buildings that surround it. Planned and laid out by that great designer Shah Abbas, it is no less than five hundred and sixty yards long by a hundred and seventy-four yards wide. In former days at times of festival it was crowded from end to end with booths and stalls and a great concourse of those who bought and sold. At other times it was cleared that the nobility might play the game of pell-mell, or polo, or that the king himself might give an exhibition of his prowess.

In the centre was erected a mast or maypole, some twenty-five feet high, on the top of which was placed an orange or a melon to be shot at with an arrow as the horseman galloped by below. Both Shah Ismail and Shah Sefi I. were reported to be adepts at the game, and occasionally showed their skill in public before the admiring Court and populace. Oftener, however, they sat enthroned aloft in the *talar* above the Ali Kapi, watching in regal state the progress of the games and tournaments.

At the northern end of the Meidan stands the Nakkara Khaneh, the Drum Tower, a fine gateway with arched galleries that gives entrance into the covered-in bazaar behind. Here at sundown in royal days the musicians made appalling music with discordant clash of tambours, trumpets, drums, flutes, harps, and cymbals. Above the archway once stood a great clock, said to have been made by an Englishman for Shah Abbas; but as the maker was killed by a Persian soon after its completion, the clock remained out of order until finally removed a hundred years ago. Above the clock hung a big bronze bell, plundered from a Portuguese nunnery at Ormuz, upon which were engraved the words 'Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis mulieribus'—a strange inscription to look down upon the great square at Ispahan. This too has disappeared, having been taken down at the beginning of last century to be melted into cannon.

Opposite the Ali Kapi Gate, on the eastern side of the square, is the mosque of Shekh Lutfullah, the mosque of the chief priest of Ispahan. Its dome is one of the most striking objects of the square, a mass of blue and yellow mosaics, making a glorious

patch of colour in the sunlight behind the row of *chenars* that rise before it in all the verdant beauty of the early spring.

It is, however, neither the Ali Kapi, nor the Nakkara Khaneh, nor the Mosque of Shekh Lutfullah that dominates the Meidan-i-Shah. The most imposing building of them all stands on the southern side of the square. Towering aloft the Musjid-i-Shah, the Royal Mosque of Ispahan is the most conspicuous landmark in the city. Built by Shah Abbas in the early years of the seventeenth century, it is reputed to have cost no less than a hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds. Many succeeding monarchs have added to and restored the original fabric, but it still remains one of the noblest of the many buildings raised by the great founder of the greatness of Ispahan. Within its sacred precincts were preserved in former days a number of relics priceless in Mussalman eyes, chief among them being the bloodstained coat worn by Husein on the day of his martyrdom and a copy of the Koran written by the hand of the Imam Reza. The splendid front of the mosque, with its dome and four flanking minarets, is a blaze of colour. The cupola is covered with tiles in exquisite patterns of dark blue and green on a pale blue ground excelling in beauty anything of the kind to be seen from Bushire to Resht, save perhaps at the shrine of Fatima at Kum. Though two Englishmen once gained access into the mosque itself, the 'unbeliever' is now rigorously excluded, only being admitted on sufferance to the first great quadrangle beyond the lofty arched gateway that faces the Meidan.

There is little else of special interest in Ispahan

itself. The bazaars that lie behind the Nakkara Khaneh differ but little from those of Shiraz. They are, however, of very considerable extent, and, next to Shiraz, rank as the finest in the East. It is the same scene of constant life and movement, of endless bargaining and ceaseless passing to and fro of an eager crowd of those that buy and sell. It is the second largest trading-mart in Persia, and, in spite of the decay that has overtaken this city of the Sefavi kings, its prosperity shows no sign of waning. Almost all the imports are brought up from Bushire, and consist very largely of English and European goods, of cotton cloths from Manchester, and copper sheets, crockery, and candles from England, of woollen stuffs from Germany and Austria, of loaf sugar from Marseilles, brown sugar from Java and Mauritius, and of tea from India and China. The exports are far less numerous and far inferior in value, chief among them being opium, tobacco, almonds, and the far-famed Persian carpets manufactured in the neighbouring districts.

There are several interesting excursions to be made from Ispahan. The best known is perhaps that to the Minari Jumban, the Shaking Minarets of Guladan, some six miles west of Ispahan. It is a fascinating drive there through the narrow streets on the outskirts of Julfa, where often there is but just room for the carriage to pass, disclosing charming glimpses of narrow streams overhung by willows or picturesque pigeon-towers set among the trees. The shaking minarets rise above the tomb of Shekh Abdullah, of whom no memory but his name survives. On either side of and above the arch that covers the

tomb they extend to a height of some twenty feet, a platform thirty feet in width separating them. Inside the minarets a small spiral staircase gives access to the summit. Up one of these the attendant climbs, and by pressing against the side of it, and swaying firmly to and fro, he imparts a swaying movement to the minaret, which in turn communicates along the thirty feet of platform with the other minaret, swaying it too in unison. It is an extraordinary sight to watch them both rocking against the sky, as if oscillated by some wonderful upheaval of the earth beneath. Why the movement of the one should communicate itself to the other it is difficult to say, and no adequate explanation has yet been offered.

Not far off from the shaking minarets is a small rocky knoll crowned by a heap of ruins of sun-dried bricks. It is known as the Atesh Gah, and is said to have once been a fire-altar erected by Artaxerxes Longimanus in the days of Zoroastrian supremacy. Within sight, but nearer Julfa and half way up the Kuh-i-Suffa, are the remains of a pavilion built by Shah Suleiman and known as the Takht-i-Suleiman, commanding a magnificent view over Ispahan and the surrounding plain. Below once stood the beautiful palace of Ferahabad, the Abode of Joy, built by Shah Sultan Husein, and made by him into a perfect terrestrial paradise. So much enamoured was he of its beauty that when the Afghan invasion came he offered to abandon his capital to its fate provided only that he might keep the Abode of Joy. His appeal, however, was vain, and the garden, after having been overrun by the Afghans, was destroyed

by them when they finally evacuated Ispahan a few years later. Similar annihilation has overtaken the once strongly fortified castle of Tabarrak, where the royal treasure was guarded in the days of the Sefavi kings.

Such is Ispahan, a fascinating city of the past, full of the evidences of decay yet still prosperous and thriving and holding its place as the second city in the kingdom. There is small wonder that the Ispahani takes an inordinate pride in its beauty and importance, speaking arrogantly of it as 'Ispahan-nisf-i-Jehan,' 'Ispahan is half the world.'

CHAPTER XV

BY KASHAN AND KUM TO TEHERAN

A long journey of over two hundred and eighty miles separates Ispahan from the capital. Fortunately a new conveyance is available and the old one may be discarded. The last one sees of it, it is standing in the Meidan-i-Shah, a perfect wreck of all that a carriage should be. One wonders when, if ever, patched up and repaired, it will attempt the adventurous journey again. Yet it is with something of regret one parts company with it. In spite of its dilapidated appearance, the impossible roads, and its somersault into the pit at Persepolis, it had carried one for over three hundred miles without a breakdown, and had one known what lay ahead one would have still further appreciated its powers of endurance. The new carriage inspires more confidence at the outset, it is true, but it is not long before that confidence is sadly betrayed. It is a huge, cumbersome landau with room for half a dozen people comfortably seated inside. The proprietor is proud with the information that it was once the property of his Imperial Majesty the Shah and that within its capacious depths, closely screened from view, the ladies of the royal harem once took their evening drive along the streets of the capital. This may be the reason

that the windows are of solid woodwork, forcing one to sit with the sun by day or the cold air by night pouring in upon one or else in the gloom of almost total darkness. But this is a minor inconvenience, altogether to be disregarded after a five hundred mile journey across Persia; and hopeful, from the strong appearance of the carriage, of a safe and speedy drive, we lumber off through the narrow streets of Julfa once more to take the northward road.

Across the bridge of Ali Verdi Khan for the last time and along the famous Chehar Bagh, the heavy carriage rolls on its way and enters the Bazaar. It seems impossible that it should ever pass between the stalls and among the jostling throng, yet slowly we swing onwards, the foot passengers scattering good-naturedly to right and left, taking the inconvenience all as a part of the day's work. It is one long succession of shops that seems as if it will never end. Of every conceivable kind they are, all the wares spread out in neat array on the open stalls to tempt the passer-by. Every calling plies its trade in full public view, and the noise of the blacksmith's hammer and the carpenter's tools rings out above the buzz of conversation and the passing of many feet. Through numberless archways and gateways, with always the same busy scene of life and activity beyond, we force a way until at last we reach the open road.

Ahead lies a vast expanse, bounded many miles away on every side by range on range of hills. To the left towers up the loftiest range in Central Persia, the Kuh Natanz, with its crown of snow,

topping ten thousand feet above sea-level. The riding road runs straight across these heights, a mighty climb over the Kohrud Pass. Here in the sheltered uplands is a favourite summer retreat of the Ispahani, amidst orchards and meadows that abound with fruit and flowers. The carriage route, however, necessarily makes a wide détour, joining the riding track again before reaching Kashan. For miles after leaving Ispahan the road runs over a long series of tiny bridges, spanning the watercourses that freely intersect the plain. It is a fair road, considering that which has gone before and that which is to come after, and we make good speed to Gez, the first halting-place. It is a large village, its most prominent feature a number of mud-domes, the colour of desert sand, that look bare and unsightly, as if they had been robbed of the mosaics that once covered them. On again across the limitless plain, one seems to make but little progress, the mighty Kohrud range of mountains towering always on the left as if it were impossible to escape from beneath its shadow. Here and there lies a smiling patch of cultivation, the sown separated from the desert only by tiny artificial streams, all else one bare expanse of sand broken only by numberless tufts of coarse dry grass. Khafr, a deserted-looking village built in tier on tier against a stretch of rising ground, grows slowly out of the distance, lifeless and bare, mud-coloured. Then slowly the scene changes and we dip down into a valley green with crops and the freshness of spring, its numerous villages snug and prosperous, shut in by the hills on either side that add their rugged barren beauty to the softer

landscape of the plain. Then again the desert, one long expanse of sand. For many a mile the wheels of the carriage drag heavily, the horses straining at the traces to pull them through. It is a monotonous drive, literally nothing but the barren plain and the bare brown hills in view. But at last the snow-peaks which have so long seemed to keep abreast of us fall back behind and slowly the range descends and slopes away into the plain. So after twenty-four hours' continuous travel we draw near to the city of Kashan, the last stretch of the way lying between enormous fields of brilliant golden corn and long wavy sand-dunes that stretch far off to the horizon on the right.

It is a curious flat-roofed city, every house with its squat mud-domes that give it somewhat the look of a small child's city on the sands. Like almost every other city in the land of the Lion and the Sun, it bears deep cut upon it the marks of evil days. It would not be difficult to believe, as one passes through its streets, that Kashan had but now escaped from the hands of the spoiler. Houses empty and deserted, walls broken down and crumbling, and heaps of bricks and rubbish lying as they fell give the town an altogether pathetic appearance of decay. Seen in its present state, it is difficult to realise that this is the city of which Geoffrey Ducket, the English merchant of the British Muscovy Company, wrote so glowingly in 1573. 'A town that consisteth altogether of merchandise,' he reported it to be, 'and the best trade of all the lande is there beynge greatly frequented by the merchantes of India. The towne is much to be commended for the civill and

good government that is there used. An idle person is not suffered to live amongst them. The childe that is but five yeeres olde is set to some labour. Playing at dice or cardes is by the lawe present death.' Such a picture might seem highly coloured had not other travellers also dilated on the prosperity and the law-abiding character of the Kashanis. 'A more industrious and civil People, or a town better governed,' wrote the inimitable Sir Thomas Herbert in 1627, 'Persia elsewhere has not.' In those days, if report is to be believed, Kashan had no fewer than 6500 houses, with forty mosques and three colleges, being surrounded by a double wall with five gates.

Of its earlier history but little survives. In legend it lives as the home of the great warrior Kamus, who flourished in the time of Khusem, the mythical potentate who is supposed to have reigned eight centuries before Christ. There is also a tradition that it got its name Kashan, the King's Dwelling, from the fact that it gave shelter to one of the Sassanian kings, while it is said to have been almost entirely rebuilt by Zobeideh, the wife of Harun-ul-Rashid. But the most interesting legend in connection with Kashan is that it was from here the Magi, the wise men of the East, set out for Jerusalem to worship the Infant Christ. It is generally agreed by theologians that it was from Persia that the wise men came; and although there can be necessarily little authentic to connect them with any definite place, several writers have adduced reasons for believing that they came from Kashan or its near neighbourhood. Odoric, the Venetian envoy

who came this way early in the fourteenth century, states with assurance that it was from Kashan that they set out, reaching Jerusalem by Divine guidance in thirteen days. And as one treads the streets of the city and mixes with the Eastern throng, it is not difficult to picture in imagination the wise men leaving all behind them and setting out to follow the mystic call, which had so strangely summoned them to worship at a manger in a far-off land.

A tall leaning minaret, the tower of Zein-ud-Din, some hundred and thirty feet high, is the most striking landmark in Kashan. It dates as far back as the thirteenth century and is ascended by a spiral staircase inside. Its original purpose is unknown, but for long it served as a place of execution for adulterous wives. Taken to the top of it by their outraged relatives they were forcibly pushed over the edge and dashed to pieces on the ground below. The Musjid-i-Maidan, containing an exquisite prayer niche, is one of the mosques that survives out of the forty that once adorned the city.

The Kashanis have not altogether lost the reputation for industry that they once had. They are still famous for their skill in the manufacture of silks and satins, velvets and brocades. Formerly the silkworm was largely cultivated in the neigh bourhood, but even this industry has considerably declined in recent times. Brass and copper work also employs a large number of Kashanis, much of it being prepared from metal imported from England. The clay of the surrounding district is excellent for the manufacture of earthenware vessels for ornament and domestic use, while many of the

tiles used all over Persia to adorn the mosques are the products of Kashan. It is strange that a people who have shown such industry and have maintained so great a reputation for at least three centuries should have allowed their native town to fall into such a state of hopeless ruin and disrepair. Their ingenuity seems to have spent itself in the production of the ornamental things of life, and they are quite content to produce their beautiful silks and velvets, their brass and copper work, and their exquisite tiles while their city tumbles about their ears. Outside their workshops they seem to have lost all energy, and their pusillanimity and cowardice have passed into a proverb. A story is told of them, that a company of Kashanis was impressed into his service by Nadir Shah and forced much against its will to serve with his troops in India. On his return to Persian soil, he disbanded many of his troops and dismissed the Kashanis to their home. His surprise and disgust when the Kashan contingent, several thousand strong, turned back to ask him for an escort of a hundred of his musketeers to protect them on their homeward way can be better imagined than described.

Leaving Kashan at daybreak, after a comfortable night in the telegraph rest-house, we set out to visit the famous palace of Fin. It lies some distance off the main road to Kum, about four miles in a direct line from Kashan. The driver of the carriage obstinately refuses to take us off the main road, though the difference between the beaten track and the rest of the plain just here would be difficult to discover. There is nothing to be done but to walk

THE PALACE OF FIN.

the distance, and we start off on foot across the barren stretch of sand. Fortunately on the way we come across a hut with a pony tied before the door, and this we borrow, with a man to act as guide. It is a long ride but the reward is at the end. Far off, on the slopes of the hillside, lies the patch of green that marks the gardens of the palace. It is a marvellous oasis in the desert. Raised by the whim of a Persian potentate on the bare hillside, it is a thing of exquisite joy and beauty. Nothing could be more typical of an Eastern monarch's power and waywardness than to bring to life this sylvan retreat, these avenues of shades and running water before the frescoed summer-houses, where Nature had provided but the bare brown plain. Shah Abbas, that great monarch of a great day, was its designer. Here, on the slope of the hill with its glorious view of mountain and plain and the domed city of Kashan, he built it as a shooting-box and summer-house to which he could retire alike from his gay and festive capital and from affairs of State. After the great man had passed away it fell into ruins, to be restored a hundred years ago by the Kajar monarch Fath Ali Shah, who often resorted to it from his capital at Teheran. With the paintings that he loved he adorned its summer-houses, paintings that chiefly depicted his own royal person and his Court, seated in state or pursuing the chase with all the paraphernalia of an Eastern monarch's sport. With its pavilions, gay with these paintings and mosaics, its avenues of cypress and *chenar* and *bid*, its innumerable blue-tiled channels of running water, its splashing fountains and its wealth of roses and rare

blossoms, it must have been an exquisite retreat. Enough even to-day remains to show what it must once have been, an abode of exquisite refreshment and restfulness and peace. Yet even here in this garden of beauty and delight tragedy has entered. Just over fifty years ago Mirza Taki Khan, chief minister and brother-in-law of the reigning Shah, sought refuge here, but the royal edict had gone forth that his life was forfeit, and in one of the cool tiled bathrooms, which is still pointed out, a treacherous attendant opened his veins and left him to bleed to death.

Pursuing the northward road again, the great Mount Demavend first comes in sight. It is a magnificent snow-capped mountain, nineteen thousand four hundred feet high, and no setting, from the southern point of view at least, could have been finer. Though still but a speck on the horizon every mile brings it clearer into outline, the view over the plain uninterrupted, and the Elburz range in which it stands seeming but to set off its towering height. It is a magnificent landmark of ever-changing aspect and never-changing interest. All this stage is one expanse of waving corn, ripe already to harvest. Here and there the villagers, blue-smocked and squatting on the ground, are cutting it with their long curved sickles, a curious contrast to the harvesters at home. So far the carriage has run without mishap, but here the wheels begin to show signs of weakness, and the driver has to get down from the box every few miles to drive in more securely the loose spokes and pins. Later on, after darkness has fallen, a bad bump on the road brings the carriage

to a sudden stop, while the horses career away with the pole, dragging the driver from the box-seat after them. The sudden jolt has dislodged the iron peg that kept the pole in place, and the nut having disappeared for good it is some considerable time before we can make things sufficiently secure to proceed. It is a pitch-dark night and the only light available is that of a hurricane lantern supported by a candle. We are off at last, however, though three times before we reach the next halting-stage at Sinsin, at the foot of the hills, the peg falls out again. Here, with the help of a blacksmith from the caravanserai, a fine building erected by the chief minister of Fath Ali Shah, we manage to make things more secure and pass on again into the night.

It is so dark that it is marvellous how the driver manages to keep to the track across the broad open plain. Through a long and stony pass, where the carriage wheels need constant attention, the road winds on to another open plain, whereon is situated the big caravanserai of Shurab. Beyond lies a still more stony track over which we jolt slowly, almost at a walk, a long dreary drive that seems interminable. Crossing a stream, we reach the post-house at Pasangun just as the first faint streaks of dawn appear in the eastern sky. Never was day more welcome. It was impossible to sleep in the jolting carriage, in momentary fear of a complete and final breakdown with half the journey still to be done. Patched up again at the rest-house, we set out on the last stage towards the famous city of Kum, whose golden dome and blue and gold minarets are visible afar off above the trees. There is one last adventure

to try our patience as we approach the city. In the bed of a river which has practically dried up save for a depth of mud, the wheels of the carriage stick fast, and for over an hour every effort to get them out fails. There is no one in sight to give a helping hand, and the efforts of the horses only serve to break the harness into ribands. So deep is the mud that it is almost impossible to get out and push behind, and it is not until a couple of camel drivers come to our help that we finally drag the carriage out and are once more on our way.

Viewed from a distance Kum is a city of domes and minarets. As at Kashan, the roof of almost every house rises in a succession of low squat domes, giving the whole a curiously undulating look. Above them all towers the magnificent golden dome and stately minarets of the shrine of Fatima. It is an immense town that has gathered round this sacred spot, a close-packed jumble of narrow streets and alleys, the houses tight pressed against each other in stifling array. Entering from the south it is a drive of over half an hour before the carriage emerges on the further side, and crossing the bridge over the Rud-i-Anarbar draws up at the finest rest-house it has yet been our luck to find in Persia. Kum is the meeting place of many roads, from Ispahan and Shiraz, from Yezd and Burujird, and from Kazvin and Teheran, and it was doubtless for this reason that Fath Ali Shah built here the fine mehmankhaneh, or inn, which ranks second to none in all Persia save only to that at Kazvin. Fully furnished with chairs and tables and beds, its comforts are appreciated to their utmost limit after days and nights in a lumbering carriage on a

jolting road and the scant accommodation of a telegraph rest-house.

The bazaar through which one enters Kum is one long covered archway, with stalls on either side between which the carriage has barely room to pass. Often we have to wait while the stallholder pulls back his stall or hastily snatches in some of his wares that have encroached upon the roadway. One stall we carry almost bodily away, sweeping off the whole contents as we pass. The stall is a sweetmeat one, and two enormous wooden bowls full to the brim with curds fall with a crash, a catastrophe that nothing but prompt payment can repair. The stallholder shows no trace of resentment. Doubtless 'God willed it' and he picks up such of his goods as admit of being picked up again and accepts what we give him with an unmoved countenance. There seems an even greater variety than ever seen before of goods exposed for sale. The fruit and vegetable stalls, with their trays neatly packed with melons and cucumbers for which Kum is famous, pomegranates, custard apples, and a dozen kinds of native vegetables, look trim and tempting, while close by, in striking contrast, the tailors are busy making the neat round caps and the bootmakers are turning out in endless quantities the leather shoes in constant daily use. Most interesting of all are the potters, who make the long-necked earthenware jars in use in every household. Owing to the porous nature of the clay of which they are made they have a wonderful power of rapidly cooling the water poured into them, and being of an extremely brittle nature the demand is as constant as the supply is large. Many of them are beautifully coloured, being

perfect works of art. The art of producing the wonderful bright blue colour for which Kum has long been famous is now almost lost, the secret being possessed by only one old man, who guards it so jealously that he declares his intention of letting it die with him. The only articles he now makes in it are salt-cellars, and, though the colouring is exquisite, so carelessly are they made that it is difficult to find one without a flaw to mar its beauty.

It is the shrine of Fatima that is at once the glory and greatness of Kum. This is the second most sacred spot in all Persia, and to it kings and princes and a countless host of pilgrims have come in life to worship, and returned in death to lay their bones beneath its sacred soil. Fatima-el-Masuma, the Immaculate, was the sister of Imam Reza, the eighth Imam, and there is a tradition that, fleeing from Baghdad to escape the persecution of the Kaliphs, she came to Kum, and making it her home finally died in the odour of sanctity and was buried there in A.D. 816. So devoted to her was the Imam Reza that he is still popularly said to come every Friday from his own shrine at Meshed to visit her in the mosque at Kum. Destroyed by Timur in his relentless march, Kum rose again to greatness under the Sefavi kings, to whom it owed much of its later popularity as a place of pilgrimage. It became to them, too, a royal place of sepulture, much as Naksh-i-Rustam and Persepolis had been to the Achæmenian kings. Within sight of the sacred shrine lie buried Shah Sefi I., Shah Abbas II., Shah Suleiman, and Shah Sultan Husein, while the succeeding Kajar dynasty has furnished two royal

sepulchres in the persons of Fath Ali Shah and Mahomed Shah. The two latter lie in a separate shrine, but the four Sefavis lie within the precincts of the shrine of Fatima itself, their bodies encased, it is said, in sarcophagi of marble and alabaster, of silver and ivory, of camphor wood and ebony, on which the eye of the infidel may not rest.

Emerging from the bazaar one comes suddenly upon an immense open space, one vast graveyard covered from end to end with flat stone slabs, as if they jostled each other to lie close beside the famous shrine that rises immediately behind. It is a striking approach, a strange medley of life and death, of religious fanaticism and worldly gain. To the right runs a long row of shops, gay with their wares, hundreds of long-necked water-bottles set in array in one, row on row of shoes in another, English cotton goods gay with colours in a third—all things necessary to tempt the pilgrim to the shrine, typical of modern life and interest. A row of booths stretches right to the great gateway of the mosque itself. But though the scum of the earth who have fled to this holy place for sanctuary, be they only of the Faithful, may buy and sell before the very shrine, the infidel may not even approach to look within. The Seyids of Kum are reputed the most bigoted and fanatical in all Persia. This is the Dar-el-Amin, the Seat of Safety, wherein the blackest and most crime-stained believer may rest assured of sanctuary, but where even the appearance of the stranger rouses suspicion and hostile looks. Every step that one takes as one draws nearer to the holy place is watched with jealous eyes by a gathering crowd,

which finally unmistakably bars the way while one is yet some hundred paces from the outer doorway.

It is thus only afar off and from the outside that one may view the mosque of Fatima. The great gold dome is a dazzling sight in the blazing sunlight, while the brilliant blue of the five minarets flash and sparkle like glass. For the crust of gold and the blue tiles the mosque is indebted to Fath Ali Shah. Fired with religious enthusiasm in his early youth, he is said to have vowed to embellish the shrine of Fatima should he ever ascend the throne, a vow he amply fulfilled. Within the mosque, behind a massive silver gateway, hidden by hangings of cloth of gold and velvet trappings, lies in the holy of holies the tomb of Fatima the Immaculate, to which the humblest believer, fleeced at every turn by the waiting mullahs, is finally allowed to make his way and worship at its feet.

From Kum a carriage road runs the remaining ninety-six miles to Teheran. It is the first sign of a made road one has yet struck in Persia outside the large towns. It was constructed some years ago to provide an easier means of access for pilgrims to the sacred shrine, and though as a driving road it leaves much to be desired it is an immense improvement on the rough unmade track which we have followed hitherto. It is assuredly the irony of fate that the first real breakdown to the carriage should occur in the first few miles along this made road after all that has gone before. There being considerable traffic between Kum and the capital, we had hoped to secure another carriage, but there was only one available—a small victoria, hardly capable of containing all one's

luggage, and itself not particularly inspiring and robust to look upon. So with the old carriage again tinkered up we had set out, hoping to cover the last ninety-six miles on a fairly good road without any mishap. But, five miles out, the end of that carriage came so far as we were concerned. With a sudden crash, as we lumbered along, all the spokes of the wheel, which had given us so much trouble, flew out and the carriage heaved over on to its side. The wheel was smashed to fragments, and this time there could be no hope of repair. There was nothing to be done but to congratulate oneself, with true Persian philosophy, that this had not happened half way *en route*, and that help and Kum were only five miles away. Jaffir, hastily despatched on one of the horses to bring up the victoria, arrived three hours later, after a long and wearisome delay, and the new carriage when it did arrive proved a tight fit indeed for oneself and Jaffir and the luggage. Constantly through the night, just when one had dozed off, one woke with a start to grab one's belongings as they were on the point of falling out. It was a bitterly cold night, the wind sweeping over an enormous salt lake that skirts the road, and to make things still less cheerful it began to rain a mild, steady drizzle that just sufficed to make everything uncomfortably damp. There was little of interest on the road, even when day had dawned. One long straight line of white, the road stretches ahead, bare and tenantless, broken only from time to time by a string of camels that seem if possible to give it a yet more melancholy air. Long distances apart are the five caravanserais that were built at the same time

that the road was constructed, far more modern and less old-world and picturesque than those we have left behind. Always far ahead rises the great Elburz range, with the snow-clad crest of Mount Demavend towering above it into the sky, the one great landmark to guide the traveller northwards. And so at last we descend into the great plain, on the further side of which lies Teheran, the capital of to-day, almost hidden from view, in spite of its many palaces and domes and minarets, beneath its wealth of trees.

CHAPTER XVI

TEHERAN

If ever there was a meeting-place of East and West it is Teheran. It is the most extraordinary conglomeration of things Asian and European it is possible to conceive. A typically Eastern city it has suddenly covered itself, at the imperious command of a King of Kings, with an outward Western veneer that sits as strangely upon it as a new transparent garment, thrown carelessly over an old and shabby garb. It is as if a woman in gaudy rags drew round her a gossamer cloak of fine and delicate thread. Asiatic the city deep down at heart must always remain, and Western influences sit but lightly upon it. The atmosphere of the East is in its very being, unchanged and unchangeable beneath its outward covering.

The most striking fact for reflection is that Teheran has not acquired its Western veneer, like many an Indian city, through the coming of the Westerner as a sojourner within its gates, but has itself of its own free will, in the person of the Shah-in-Shah, adopted its Western garb. The Europeans in Teheran are still a small and distinctly foreign community, living apart and regarded not without suspicion and hostility. Beyond the members of the

Legations, the officials of the Telegraph Department, and the Bank of Persia there is only a small and unimportant European element. That this element is composed very largely of undesirables—men of all nations, adventurers who have gathered together in this one of the few remaining places in the world where any day there may be a general scramble and anything may turn up—is a fact recognised by the Teheranis, who in consequence are little likely to absorb fresh Western influences from it. This class of foreigners has never been admitted to the smallest share of life and interest in the capital; it has raised no buildings and opened no shops and has been rigorously excluded from all social intercourse. It is practically the will of one man, Nasr-ed-Din Shah, which has given to the capital that veneer of Western civilisation that sits so curiously upon it. It is in this respect that Teheran is unique. Conservative with all the conservatism of the East, it can yet at the whim of a monarch suddenly change its face and masquerade in another garb, or later still, after centuries of absolutism, suddenly spring upon the world a popular representative assembly and a brand-new constitution. It all strikes one as intensely unreal. To be frantically keen upon a thing for a day and to forget all about it the next is so typically Persian that it is difficult to take things seriously in Teheran, where life reminds one irresistibly of comic opera at every turn.

A strange mixture of East and West, Teheran is also a curious medley of old and new. The first authentic record of its existence dates back to the end of the twelfth century. Long previous to that,

MOHAMMED ALI, SHAH.
(Deposed July 1909)

HIS ELDEST SON AND SUCCESSOR.

however, there had existed in the immediate vicinity the ancient city of Rhey, the capital of Media and perhaps the oldest centre of civilisation in all Persia. How the city declined and has to-day almost faded out of sight, and the new city of Teheran gradually sprung up six miles away, is one of the mysteries that the East holds fast. All that the first writer on Teheran can say of it is that its people were half savages living in caves underground and with their unbridled, predatory instincts a constant source of menace to their neighbours. Gradually, however, it emerged from this its primitive state, and in the writings of the many travellers who have passed this way we can trace century by century its progress. But it was not until long afterwards that it basked in the smiles of royal favour, which is as the breath of life to an Oriental city and which it was in later days altogether to monopolise. Shah Suleiman and Shah Sultan Husein, who lie buried before the shrine of Fatima at Kum, as well as Nadir Shah, temporarily made it their headquarters, and from time to time striking incidents stand out along the uneventful years. Here the unfortunate Reza Kuli Khan was blinded by his imperious father Nadir Shah and afterwards cruelly murdered, and here in later days were brought back the remains of Nadir Shah himself that they might be cast beneath the threshold of his rival's palace, so that the feet of his enemies might tread them under foot at their going out and their coming in. Here Kerim Khan Zend from time to time came from his beloved city of the south to restore the ark or citadel, but Teheran had nothing

to offer him that could vie with the delights of Shiraz. It was not until the coming of the Kajars that Teheran attained the height of its prosperity. A new dynasty demanded a new capital, and no place could have been more favourably situated than Teheran. As always, southern Persia had been easily subdued. On that side there was no further trouble to be feared, and Ispahan and Shiraz might well be left to governors of the Royal House. From the north, if at all, their new kingdom was open to attack, and Russia even then loomed large upon the horizon of the Kajars. Above all Teheran was within reach of their own first home at Astrabad and the province of Mazanderan where their own strength lay. So Aga Mahomed Shah, the eunuch king, in 1788 set up his Court in Teheran, and it has from that time to this ever since remained the undisputed capital of all Persia.

The first of the Kajars seems to have had no time or inclination to make his new capital worthy of the name. That remained for Fath Ali Shah, whose passion for building and evident pride in his own royal person have left many evidences behind. The most splendid of the Kajar monarchs, he must have been possessed with a perfect mania for reproducing in fresco and painting representations of himself, his numerous sons and his Court, his horses, his jewels, his flowing beard and his tapering waist. It was in his day, too, that there came those numerous embassies from foreign Powers, laden with presents of every conceivable kind to catch the Oriental fancy of the monarch and win substantial concessions in return. It is amazing to read of the gifts that were

offered to him and still more curious to see many of them that still stock the royal palaces and must be hidden away in greater number still among the maze of disused rooms and corridors within. Everything about Fath Ali Shah, however, was typically Oriental; contact with the West that came to him through the numerous embassies gave him no Western aspirations. The members of the embassy, on the other hand, were forced, much against their will, to bow to Oriental custom and only enter the royal presence in long red stocking-boots which made the staid and proper Englishman so ridiculous in their own eyes that they sought exemption from the obnoxious custom by formal treaty. Nasr-ed-Din Shah, on the other hand, the first King of Kings to make the tour of Europe, altogether succumbed to the Western craze, and at his bidding the capital rapidly assumed the Western air it still retains. Seized with the idea of elevating Teheran to the level of the European cities he had seen, he set about his task with characteristic Oriental caprice and magnificence. Teheran should resemble the Paris that he loved, and at the bidding of the King of Kings its walls fell down that its borders might be enlarged, new fortifications being erected further back upon the plain that made the city eleven miles round. In the surrounding ramparts twelve gates gave access to the city, and it is typical of Persian lack of enterprise that though primarily for defence no trouble was ever taken to put these extensive fortifications into any sort or kind of defence.

The entrance to the city from the south is through an imposing gateway, high arched with

pinnacles and turrets, ablaze with many coloured tiles that impress the new arrival from afar, but disclose all their gaudiness as one draws near. This is the main southern gate of the city, and it is something of a surprise to find that the city is by no means yet reached, an enormous desolate space still existing in between, where the city has not yet kept pace with the imagination of Nasr-ed-Din and increased up to its new boundary. Beyond the bare space the approach to the heart of the capital is the worst that could be imagined. Through mean streets, squalid and narrow, the roadway filthy and unswept yet crowded by a shabby motley throng, the carriage jolts along to the accompaniment of many short sharp cries to clear the way, the driver seeming to take a fiendish delight in urging the horses to their topmost speed now when at last we come upon a crowded thoroughfare. Other kalashes, or victorias, drawn by two and sometimes three horses dash by all at full gallop, making the roadway a thing of terror to any but the imperturbable Persian, their mad gallop one long career of hairbreadth escapes.

Out of the maze of narrow ill-kept streets we dash suddenly through another magnificent gateway and emerge upon the finest square in Teheran. Paved with cobbled stones, it is small in comparison with the enormous Meidan-i-Shah at Ispahan, but the buildings that surround it, the cannon that adorn it, and more especially the imposing gateway that gives access to it, lend it an air of unsurpassed distinction. Known as the Tup Meidan, the Gun Square, the northern and southern sides of it are occupied by the artillery barracks, low one-storied

buildings of no architectural merit. The Bank of Persia, located in a fine imposing building of Persian design and structure, occupies almost the whole of the eastern side. On the west stands the arsenal, and in front of it are placed a number of antiquated cannon that, typically Persian, look outwardly imposing but on inspection prove to be altogether out of date and useless. In the centre of the square is a large tank flanked at the four corners by more cannon. Close by the Bank of Persia in the south-east corner is the Nasiriyeh Gate, a handsome structure of high arches and delicate façades which leads to the palace and the bazaars, while at the other end of the same side is the Dowlet Gate, also leading to the citadel and the palace, over which floats the royal standard when the Shah-in-Shah is in residence.

On the northern side another handsome gateway leads to the so-called Avenue des Ambassadeurs, in spite of the fact that there is only one ambassador in Teheran—the Turkish—the other missions ranking only as legations. It is a fine street bordered by poplars and gay with the passing of the fine equipages of the Ministers, escorted by dashing sowars, while soldiers of all nationalities and in every variety of uniform swagger along or lounge upon the roadway. Most of the legations open out from it, shut off from view by high walls and a wealth of trees. At the far end, half a mile or more from the Tup Meidan, is the British Legation, the most restful and charming spot in all Teheran. Hospitably quartered in one of the small bungalows included in its grounds, it was a perfect retreat to withdraw to after much exploring in the hot and dusty byways

of the capital. Enclosed by high walls and entered by a fine gateway before which paces a sentry, a smart sowar of Indian cavalry, and over which floats the British flag, it is all that the most exacting of Ministers could desire. The extensive grounds are beautifully laid out and trimly kept, with many paths shaded and cool, a fresh green expanse of lawn, and beds gay with many flowers. The house itself is a handsome building occupying three sides of a square with a clock-tower above one angle, the entrance approached by a lofty flight of steps. Behind lies a delightful verandah looking out over the garden, a mass of English flowers, and cool with great tanks of water. Nothing could well be more restful than the peace of this perfect garden after the noise and dust and heat of Teheran.

Retracing our steps towards the centre of the town, a gateway opens out of the Avenue des Ambassadeurs on the right on to the Meidan-i-Mashk, the Parade Square. It is an immense open space, the finest enclosed parade ground in the heart of any capital in the world. Over a quarter of a mile long, it is used for the training of the Shah's troops, which at the time of our visit were under European direction. The Persian Cossacks to be seen on parade there are the finest troops in the service of the Shah. Splendid horsemen, if only they can be taught discipline and self-control, and, it should be added, if only pay can be found for them, they should prove the strongest weapon in the hands of the Shah-in-Shah in his contest with the people.

There is one other square that deserves more than a passing notice. It is the Meidan-i-Shah,

which lies near the royal palace. At the entrance to it is the Nakkara Khaneh, without which no royal city would be complete. It is a fine arched gateway with rooms on either side and a gallery above, where at sunrise and sunset the musicians discourse their weird music to proclaim to the world the passing of the hours and the majesty of the Shah-in-Shah. In the centre of the square is a large tank, beside which stands an enormous brass gun known as the Tup-i-Murvarid, the Cannon of Pearls. Why it was so called it is not easy to discover, but it appears once to have been either hung with a chain of pearls or itself studded with jewels which have long since disappeared. In some mysterious unexplained way it has acquired a sacred character and, like the Ali Kapi Gate at Ispahan, affords *bast* or sanctuary to any criminal who claims its shelter. It is even endowed with miraculous qualities, children and women resorting to it and touching it in full faith that their desires will be fulfilled. There is another tradition that this is the cannon cast by Kerim Khan Zend at Shiraz and transported to Teheran after his death, along with the marble throne, by his rival Aga Mahomed Shah. Another tradition, however, asserts that it was captured from the Portuguese by the Persians and British during their short-lived alliance at Ormuz in 1622.

It is within the ark or citadel that the chief interest in Teheran lies. Here, far within this maze of many courts and courtyards, of gardens and pleasaunces, of winding corridors and galleries innumerable, lives the Shah-in-Shah, the titular successor of the great Kings of Kings of another

day and race, a shadowy unknown quantity, irresponsible and close hidden from public view by Ministers and courtiers, so that none outside the palace may know what manner of man he is. The ark is something like a quarter of a mile square. Nothing but a carefully prepared plan could give the visitor an idea of the jumble of gardens and courts and buildings within. The main road outside, as we arrive, is crowded with carriages of all sorts, and a constant stream of officials passes in and out of the unimposing doorway that opens on the street, for in one of the courtyards are many of the public offices of the Ministers where much of the business of State is carried on. Armed with credentials, as one is, from the British Legation, and punctual to the time fixed by the Minister to see the palace, the haughty underling at the gate, dressed in much authority, seems to take pleasure in putting one to every possible delay. At last, however, an official presents himself to act as cicerone and one is admitted with formal courtesy. Unfortunately the guide, an official in the office of the Minister of the Interior, speaks no English, but happily he knows a little French, which is very widely spoken in Teheran, and that and Persian prove all that is required.

Behind the small courtyard that opens on the public street lies another and larger one at the end of which stands the *talar*, or throne-room. Here, much in the manner of Darius and the great Achæmenian kings at Persepolis, the Shah, until the recent troubles began, used from time to time to show himself to his assembled people with all the

pageantry of Eastern state. The day of No-Ruz, the New Year, was the greatest day of all, when at the coming of the spring the Shah held audience. The *talar* is a handsome, highly decorated open chamber, set with mirrors and adorned with colour, with a wainscoting of alabaster and two enormous marble fluted columns supporting the roof in front. But the chief glory of it, to which all else is but a setting, is the marble throne, the Takht-i-Marmar, of Kerim Khan. Designed by the great Governor of Shiraz, it is made of the purest Yezd marble, and after his death it was brought with the marble pillars to Teheran by Aga Mahomed Khan, who, though burning with hate to destroy all vestige of his rival's work, stayed his hand in awe and wonder at the pure beauty of this glorious marble throne. Utterly unlike our Western idea of a throne, it rather resembles a platform raised upon low pillars and approached by two steps supported by recumbent lions, 'like one of our field beds,' as the French traveller Tavernier quaintly describes a similar throne. The platform is in two tiers, and is surrounded by a balustrade, and it is on the upper portion that the King of Kings sits among a pile of gold embroidered cushions to give audience. The chaste and simple beauty of the design and the exquisite purity of the Takht-i-Marmar stand out in the memory above all else seen in the palace of the Shah.

If the city of Teheran itself has struck one as a strange jumble of East and West, that first impression is as nothing to the effect produced by the Shah's museum, which we now approach. It is situated in the most charming courtyard in all Teheran. Known as the Gulistan or Rose Garden, it is all that one

pictured in imagination as the setting of a Persian palace. There are trees everywhere, pine and poplar, cypress and plane, decked now in all the freshness of their first spring garb. Set in lines and avenues, beneath them run shady paths and well-kept walks, flower-decked, while beyond and through the trees shine broad pools of sparkling water, fed by numberless channels that run with soft lapping sound over their gay blue tiles, little ornamental foot-bridges spanning them, while fountains gaily play near by. Quaint little summer-house kiosks peep out amongst the trees, while on every side of the courtyard rise the palace buildings, the most striking of them all the Shems-ul-Imaret, the Sun of the Palace, a stately building crowned by two immense towers with a slender clock-tower in between and gay with brightly painted tiles of many colours.

But the building in the Gulistan that contains the greatest interest is the museum. Mounting a long flight of steps, broad and red-carpeted, we enter an immense hall to the left. It is a splendid apartment, bare down the centre, save at the further end. Round the walls, in glass cases and arranged on shelves, is the most amazing and motley collection it is possible to imagine. It is more like a scene out of 'Alice in Wonderland' than anything one has ever seen before in real life. Side by side with priceless *objets d'art* and Persian curiosities stand tinsel toys of European make, cheap clocks, atrocious china shepherdesses and cups and saucers, 'presents' from some English seaside watering-place. It is a perfect medley of things old and new, valuable and worthless, all jumbled together with no attempt at order or

arrangement. At the far end of the magnificent hall, which European candelabra and undistinguished modern oil-paintings do their best to disfigure, stands what is supposed to have been once the Takht-i-Taous, the original Peacock Throne that Nadir Shah brought from the Dewan-i-Khas at Delhi in the middle of the eighteenth century. It is said to have been found in a ruinous condition by Aga Mahomed Shah after the death of Kerim Khan and to have been restored by him as it now stands. Though shorn of much of its glory of gem and jewel, it is still a thing of beauty. The other Takht-i-Taous, said to have been built by Fath Ali Shah for the Peacock Lady of Ispahan, is in the inner portion of the palace. Together with the famous crown jewels which include the Derya-i-Nur, the Sea of Light, of 186 carats weight, and the famous globe of jewels said to be worth well nigh a million English pounds, it has been removed from the State apartments into the greater security of the *anderun* of the palace.

The Shah's library adjoins the museum and contains some beautiful specimens of Persian penmanship and illumination. Close by, on another side of the great quadrangle, stretches out a series of endless corridor-like rooms in which hangs a curious collection of paintings of every description, Persian and European, scarcely a single one of them worthy of note. After their vivid colouring and crude design it is a joy to turn aside, as one passes out of the palace precincts, to gaze once more upon the Takht-i-Marmar, that exquisitely pure and simple monument of Kerim Khan. Close by, beneath the pavement of one of the gateways, the bones of the great designer

himself, torn from their resting-place at Shiraz, were buried by his rival Aga Mahomed Khan that he might have the satisfaction of treading them beneath his feet each time he passed within or without his palace. With the bones of Kerim Khan were also buried those of Nadir Shah, rifled with like purpose from their sepulchre at Meshed.

After the wealth of mosques at Ispahan, Teheran seems in this respect but ill provided. So modern a capital, it seems to have missed the age when kings and princes delighted to raise magnificent tributes to their faith. The Musjid-i-Shah, with its small gilt dome, loses much by its position and is disappointing as the Shah's mosque in the Shah's own capital. The finest mosque is the most recent of all, that of the Musjid-i-Sipah-Salar, the mosque of the Commander-in-Chief, erected within the last twenty years by the munificence of Mirza Husein Khan, successively Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister for War, and Grand Vizier. Its enormous dome and four tall minarets covered with bright blue tiles tower up above the trees and form one of the striking landmarks of the city.

Outside Teheran six miles away is the mosque of Shah Abdul Azim, a celebrated place of pilgrimage. It is reached from the capital by the only line of railway now in use in all Persia. It is a quaint little narrow-gauge railway, reminding one irresistibly of a large childish toy, on which the trains run apparently when the driver pleases or when a sufficient complement of passengers has gathered. After waiting nearly two hours for the train to start, which we were confidently assured every ten minutes it

THE MEMBERS OF THE MEJLISS, THE PERSIAN PARLIAMENT.

was just going to do, we had reluctantly to forgo the distinction of travelling by the only line in Persia and do the journey by road. It is somewhat typical of Persia that so modern a thing as a railway, and the only one in the whole country, should have come into existence solely to transport pilgrims to a sacred shrine. To the mosque of Shah Abdul Azim come something like half a million pilgrims every year, and round it has grown up what may almost be regarded as a small suburb of Teheran. So sacred is it that the infidel may not even cross the threshold of the gateway of the covered bazaar that leads up to the entrance. A chain stretched across the roadway proclaims that beyond this lies sanctuary, and that though any Mussalman, however black his sins, may pass over, the Christian must stand aside and never place his foot within. He is forced to get what view he can of the exterior from one of the side lanes that skirt the bazaar. There is little to be seen save the dome and tall blue minarets above mud-walls, which appear at their best as one approaches Teheran from the south across the open plain. It is barely twelve years since there occurred the most dramatic scene that has ever taken place in all its history, when Nasr-ed-Din Shah, the King of Kings, was assassinated within the very precincts of the mosque itself.

Close by, where the shrine of Shah Abdul Azim now stands, once stood the famous city of Rhey, the great contemporary city of Nineveh and Babylon. There is little of it left to-day to mark the extensive site it once occupied. It is a pathetic ending for the city that once was called 'The Spouse of the World,'

'the greatest among cities,' and the 'Mart of the Universe.' The birthplace and residence of the famous Harun-ul-Rashid, its outlines can still be traced in ruined wall and mound. The most arresting of the remains is an immense circular tower, seventy feet high, known locally as the Nakkara Khaneh, the Drum Tower, of Yezd. It has unfortunately been recently restored in such a way as to make it appear an entirely new building. Constructed of brick, it consists only of the circular wall, being completely hollow inside and roofless. Until less than a century ago a Sassanian bas-relief survived on the surface of the rock close by, but Fath Ali Shah evidently was unable to resist the temptation to turn it into one of the representations of himself that he loved to scatter broadcast, and it now depicts that monarch, stiffly mounted, stiffly spearing a very stiff lion. Two other bas-reliefs of the same monarch are to be seen on the rocks close by, while not far off is the Chashmeh-i-Ali, the Fountain of Ali, so named after the son-in-law of the Prophet and alleged to possess miraculous properties, being visited by many of the pilgrims who come to worship at the shrine of Shah Abdul Azim.

Though the kings of the Kajar dynasty have adorned their capital with but few mosques, they have shown a perfect mania for building themselves summer-houses or shooting-boxes in the immediate neighbourhood. They adorn the slopes of the hills behind the city in almost every direction, most of them untenanted from year's end to year's end and rapidly falling into neglect and decay. The Nigaristan is one of the most famous of these retreats; but though

in the days of Fath Ali Shah, who built it and used it as his favourite country residence, it lay some distance outside the city, it is now, since the improvements of Nasr-ed-Din Shah, included within its walls. Part of its beautiful gardens have since been built over, and it is no longer occupied, showing every sign of its having fallen on evil days. It acquired its name of Nigaristan, or Picture Gallery, from the enormous pictures that adorned its walls. One of them, containing some sixty life-size figures, represents Fath Ali Shah seated on the famous Peacock Throne, surrounded by his sons and receiving in audience the ambassadors of the European Powers who came to court his favour. To enhance the splendour of the picture and with true Persian disregard for strict accuracy, all the ambassadors who came at different times have been collected together on one canvas.

The Kasr-i-Kajar, one of the most beautiful of all the summer-houses, is the most prominent feature in the landscape as one leaves Teheran, standing as it does on a commanding elevation some three miles north of the walls. The palace itself stands on a series of platforms that enhance its imposing height. Like so many other things in Persia, however, it is at its best when seen from a distance, a nearer approach disclosing how far upon the road to decay it has already gone, its terraces broken, its channels no longer filled with water and its fountains gaping bare and dry. It is long since it was occupied, and it stands now without a stick of furniture, empty save for a number of pictures in the rooms on the topmost floor. Most of them represent Fath Ali Shah, from whose impassive, bearded face and elegant

waist it seems impossible to escape. One of them, however, is of curious interest. Among those who accompanied Sir John Malcolm's mission from England was one Colonel Strachey, whose handsome face and figure so caught the fancy of Fath Ali Shah that he ordered his portrait to be painted by his own artist, and distributed replicas of it to several of his palaces to adorn the walls. Doshan Tepeh, the Rabbit Hill, lies to the north-west of the capital, an unimposing shooting-box perched on a rocky eminence which the late Shah was wont to make his headquarters when he went on hunting expeditions in the surrounding hills, which are still kept strictly as royal preserves. In recent days, however, the Shah has been too much occupied with the cares of State to allow of much relaxation. At Doshan Tepeh was the Shah's menagerie, a most undistinguished one compared with many to be found in Eastern capitals.

On the hill slope known as Shimran, about six miles from Teheran, is situated the summer residence of the British Legation. The possession of it, including as it does a considerable extent of land, by the British Government is something of an anomaly. The ownership rights of the village of Gulahek were given by Mahomed Shah to Sir John Campbell, the British representative, in 1835. The villagers, about eight hundred in number, score many advantages, being practically British subjects and avoiding all royal exactions and obligations, remaining subject only to the British Legation, to whom they pay taxes. The residence itself is small but delightfully rustic in the midst of its extensive grounds, life being lived chiefly out of doors in the

hot season of the year, when the Minister is in residence here, in a large durbar tent erected in front of the house. Though only a few hundred feet higher than Teheran, it is considerably cooler and forms a welcome retreat from the dust and heat of the city. The other Legations also have similar residences along the slopes of the hills, one of them having the same seignorial rights as the British.

Interesting as were these glimpses of Teheran new and old, there was one at the time of my passing through that surpassed them all. In the Baharistan Palace sat the Mejliss, that extraordinary assembly, suddenly called into existence by the word of a much harassed Shah to impart a brand-new constitution to the kingdom which he, and such as he, had ruled for centuries despotically with regard for the will of no man but their own. The story of the Mejliss has a humour and an interest all its own, and nothing in all Teheran gave one a clearer insight into Persian life and character than listening to a debate of this strange assembly which one was permitted to attend.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MEJLISS

The suddenness and unexpectedness with which events have moved recently in Persia, their great beginnings and their lame endings, remind one irresistibly of comic opera. Until less than three years ago Persia might well have been regarded as the last great stronghold of everything that is typically Asiatic. The Powers had penetrated even into China the exclusive, forcing their way into the most sacred retreats of the royal palaces in Pekin. But though the nations of the West have long hovered near, Persia still, though with weakening grip, maintains its integrity. Thoroughly of the East Eastern, it remains almost untouched by the influences of the West. Until less than three years ago its form of government was a despotism in its oldest and most Asiatic form. The Shah-in-Shah was a despot in the fullest and most Oriental sense of the word. Various members of his family ruled the provinces to his profit and their own advantage. As for the people, from a political point of view, they did not exist. They were there but to be ruled as the Kings of Kings had always ruled them.

Then suddenly with little or no previous warning all was changed. The outside world was astonished

SANCTUARY IN THE BRITISH LEGATION GARDENS.

to learn that the Shah had on August 8, 1906, granted his subjects the right of popular representation in a constitutional assembly, with a share in the government of the country. Persia, the land of the despot and of a people who had shown hitherto not the smallest inclination to participate in politics, was literally by a stroke of the pen provided with a parliament all complete, ostensibly representative, and carefully modelled on similar established institutions in the West. In three formal documents signed by the hand of Muzaffer-ed-Din Shah were the rights of the people set forth. The first Nizam-Nameh, the Code of Arrangement, confirmed the right of popular representation already granted and dealt with the powers of the Mejliss. The second Nizam-Nameh dealt with the question of election and the assignment of the number of representatives to each district. The Nizam-Nameh-i-Dakhili or Code of Interior Arrangement dealt with the functions of the officials of the Mejliss and the formalities connected with the actual procedure of the meetings.

In the fine palace of the Baharistan the Mejliss sat, the members close packed and cross-legged on the floor, a strange collection of moulvies, syeds, and merchants, orderly and sedate, their President seated in their midst, a small handbell on a low stool by his side. Behind a railing stood the few privileged spectators. On guard at the doors were stalwart Cossacks, while outside in the garden of the palace gathered a great company of men discussing with interest this new thing which had so suddenly arisen amongst them. The members of the Mejliss evidently took themselves with all seriousness, fully alive to

a sense of their own importance and eager to show their new won power by dictating terms not only to the Ministers, but even to the Shah-in-Shah himself. One by one the governors of the provinces, for the most part near relatives of the Shah, were dismissed at their own instance and their nominees installed in their stead. Most of the large towns, imitating the capital, followed suit by starting their own local assemblies, forcing their will upon the local governors, if necessary through the Mejliss at Teheran. Even the Zil-es-Sultan, for forty years Governor of Ispahan and who had so long occupied a foremost place in Persian politics, and the Khawam-ul-Mulk, for almost as long a time the power behind the throne in Shiraz, fell before the storm, and one of them was soon to meet his end at the assassin's hand. Yet still the Shah gave way.

It was this powerlessness of the Shah at the first assault upon his despotism that was one of the most striking features of the situation. The monarchy, strong in its centuries of tradition in a custom-ridden land, cowered suddenly before the Mejliss, a mushroom growth but a few months old, which it had itself created. The weak spot in the Shah's armour was at once apparent. He possessed no army worth the name. His absolute power so long unquestioned, and debarred as he had practically been in recent years from participation in foreign affairs, the need of an army had not been felt; consequently the Persian army, though large and imposing on paper, was found to be practically non-existent when the need arose. Troops, undrilled and without pay, proved neither willing nor able to perform their duties on a sudden emergency. Anyone

who has seen the Persian soldier will need no further evidence of the utter incompetence of the Persian army. Slovenly, undrilled, his uniform torn and soiled, he is a perfect caricature of all that a soldier should be. Yet without an efficient army the Shah was helpless in the hands of the Teheranis. Had the Shah possessed an army on which he could rely, recent events in Persia could never have occurred.

The manner in which this extraordinary revolution began is no less remarkable than its suddenness. It is surely unprecedented in the history of constitutionalism. The people of Teheran, or rather the priests and a few of the prominent citizens, had a grievance against one of the chief Ministers of the Shah. Led by two or three of the most influential townsmen, who owed the Ministers a special grudge, they ventured on remonstrance. But the Shah, encased in his absolutist traditions and ignorant of the coming storm, curtly refused them hearing. Beyond the Shah there was no appeal, but determined on the Minister's downfall the small inner circle of agitators turned to the representatives of those European nations who had so long watched Persian politics with a jealous eye. Neither England nor Russia, however, was at all anxious to be drawn into a matter of such exclusively local interest, and the agitators were for the moment at a loss, actual force being the last weapon to which a Persian has resort. Suddenly the brilliant idea suggested itself of occupying *en masse* the private grounds of one of the Legations, and by so doing, by making themselves a nuisance, to force the nation concerned to interfere. Now the British Legation has by far the

largest and most convenient grounds to camp in, and thither resorted no less than fifteen thousand of the people of Teheran, ostensibly to take refuge from the obnoxious Minister, in reality to quarter themselves there until they had forced the British Legation to interfere in order to get rid of them. It was a brilliantly original move and the simplest possible means of obtaining what they wanted. You have a grievance against a man which he refuses to redress. You therefore promptly go and sit in another man's garden and make yourself a nuisance until, in order to get rid of you, he is forced to obtain for you from the other man the redress you seek. This is exactly what happened in Teheran. It was the most Gilbertian beginning of a revolution one could well imagine, not the least comic element being the jealousy of a certain other Legation that the Persians should have chosen the British in preference to its own, and its frantic efforts to bribe as many as it could to take refuge in its garden also. The photographs give some idea of what the invasion actually meant. Fifteen thousand people living night and day in the Legation grounds and threatening to bring their wives and children with them necessarily forced the British representatives at last to interfere.

The result was that the agitators obtained what they demanded with the least possible exertion and unpleasantness to themselves. Astonished at the ease with which they had accomplished their object, the idea naturally occurred to them that while they were about it they might just as well ask for something more. It was then that the definite idea of

a representative assembly first took practical shape. The people, led by one wealthy merchant in particular, who had spent something like 300*l.* a day in feeding the crowd in the Legation grounds, clamoured now for a parliament, not one in ten knowing even the meaning of the word. The late Shah in the last stages of disease, and perhaps careless of the consequences, finally gave way to their demands and signed the decrees granting them a national assembly. A revolution, almost unheeded at the time by the outside world, had taken place, a revolution as sudden, as peaceful, and apparently as complete as it could well have been.

Not the least interesting feature of the situation was the part which the Indian, and more particularly the Calcutta and Bombay agitator, played in the revolution. A weekly paper printed in Calcutta was on sale in the Persian capital, at the gates of the assembly, some three weeks' journey distant; and no one who saw the eagerness with which it was bought and read by the crowd, which always gathered round the palace in which the Mejliss sat, could doubt its influence. It was from its columns that the Teheranis first acquired the word 'constitution.' Not only was the word a new one on Persian lips, the very idea which it conveyed was one entirely foreign to the Persian mind. The newspaper printed in Calcutta set forth the idea at length, even going so far as to draw up a ready-made constitution, something in the form of a declaration of the rights of man. The excitement that the arrival of this copy of the paper caused in Teheran was intense. It was a new idea, and, urged with much

rhetoric by the little inner circle of agitators, it quickly caught the popular fancy.

What the end will be it is difficult to foretell. As yet the Shah has shown neither ability to rule nor capacity for adapting himself to present needs. His ablest Minister, the Amin-es-Sultan, has fallen a victim to assassination. The Zil-es-Sultan, it is true, still remains—he who at one time promised to prove the strong man that Persia so sorely needs—but he is growing old and he himself has recognised that his day is past. Unless the Shah can accomplish the difficult task of raising an effective army it is difficult to see how he can win back his old absolutism. That doubtless is a thing of the past. Yet the forces on the side of the Shah have to be reckoned with. He and the members of his family still possess a very large proportion of the wealth of the whole country. With him too is all the weight of custom and tradition, which in Persia must always stand for much. It is difficult to imagine the land of the Lion and the Sun without the King of Kings, and to divine how the various provinces could be held together without him as the one central authority. On the side of the Mejliss, on the other hand, there is all the force of a newly awakened desire for political freedom, for representation, and for control of national affairs. If only the popular assembly, whatever form it may subsequently take, might be content to move slowly and not abuse the power that may be given to it, a great future lies before it. The greatest weakness of the late Government was its utter dishonesty. It is not too much to say that there was scarcely an official in all Persia

DISTRIBUTING FOOD TO THE REFUGEES IN THE BRITISH LEGATION GARDENS.

who was not open to a bribe. As a near relative of the Shah said to me, it had long been only a question as to which was the longer—the Russian rouble or the English pound. If the new Government at the outset of its political existence can only avoid this pitfall, and inspire the country with confidence in its integrity and honesty of purpose, there is hope for its future. But those who know anything of Persia and the Persian will regretfully acknowledge on how slight a foundation this hope rests.

CHAPTER XVIII

TO THE CASPIAN

On leaving Teheran one feels that the end of the journey is near at hand, though one is still eleven days' journey, travelling at the utmost speed, from here to Charing Cross. It is two hundred and forty miles from Teheran to Enzeli, on the Caspian, but the carriage service has been in existence longer and is much better organised than elsewhere in Persia, and it is possible by travelling continuously to do the whole distance in forty-eight hours. The conveyance, however, is scarcely less ramshackle than those provided at Shiraz and Ispahan, and though the cost is considerably less it is still exorbitant when viewed from the standard of comfort or discomfort it provides. Let not him who contemplates the journey home across Persia imagine that he is going to do it cheaply, unless he has limitless leisure at command and travels the whole way by caravan.

Leaving the Legation at daybreak, we pass out at full gallop through the Kazvin Gate, a gaudy structure of a single open arch, the archways on either side having been walled up, with five blue-tiled minarets above it like chimney-pots of strange and wondrous hue. Outside we come to an abrupt halt, and on inquiry find that all the luggage has to

be taken off the vehicle, where it has just been securely lodged, in order that it may be weighed. It is an annoying delay, and the fussiness of the officials extremely trying to the temper, even after all one's acquired philosophy of the road. There is considerable grumbling at the amount of the luggage, in spite of what one considered its extremely modest bulk, and a heavy toll has to be paid before it is loaded on again. Off at last, it is a long straight road that stretches ahead. Even this the best piece of roadway in Persia is little more than a cleared track, in spite of the fact that it is said to have cost 640*l.* per mile to construct. If so, the contract must have filtered through many hands, making many fortunes by the way. For hours we roll on with no adventures on the road. There are few travellers to be met with and little that is typically Persian. One realises with double force that one has left the real Persia behind. This flat stretch of land with the far-off hills has nothing of the charm and grandeur of the south. It is all more modern, on a softer and less rugged scale, the primitive touch that grips one in the south and in the heart of Persia almost entirely gone. Yet even here there are picturesque glimpses by the way. At the Karaj River we draw nearer to the mountains, where the hurrying stream, leaving a deep and narrow gorge with towering banks on either side, emerges on the plain. Near by Fath Ali Shah built yet another of the shooting-boxes that surround his capital, adorning it as usual with paintings of himself and Court. From the Karaj River to Kazvin, a hundred miles from Teheran, there

is little of note. Rain fell again for the third time since leaving Bushire, the same fine drizzling rain that beat into the carriage, in spite of all that one could do to keep it out, and made things generally uncomfortable.

Kazvin is yet another of the Persian cities that has seen its best days. Like almost every other Persian city of importance, too, it once held the proud position of capital. It is said to have been founded by the Sassanian king Shahpur II. (A.D. 310–379) but of its earliest years little has survived to be recorded. Perhaps its greatest interest is the connection it had with the robber band of the Assassins and their famous chief the Old Man of the Mountains. Only thirty miles away among the mountains lay his impregnable stronghold of Alamut, the Eagle's Nest, and in the latter part of the twelfth century his was a name of terror in all the country round, and Kazvin one of the many towns that he plundered and laid low. The name by which he was known in Europe, where strange legends of his doings were brought back by the Crusaders, was derived from his Arabic title the Sheikh-el-Jebel, while his followers derived their name of Assassins from *hashshashin* 'hashish eaters' which corrupted by the Crusaders in transit, has furnished the West with a new word for the most depraved form of murderer.

It was not till the middle of the sixteenth century that Kazvin was raised to the dignity of a capital by Shah Tahmasp, I Shaw Thomas, as the English writers quaintly termed him; but its supremacy was short-lived, and fifty years later the honour passed to Ispahan when the helm of State was in the hands of the great

Shah Abbas. Yet even after the brief days of its greatest prosperity were over, our delightful guide of well-nigh three centuries ago, Sir Thomas Herbert, gives a glowing account of it. 'It is at this day for multitude of buildings and inhabitants the chiefe in Medya,' he writes, 'and equall for other grandeur to any other city in the Persian Empire, Spawhawn [Ispahan] excepted,' to which he quaintly adds 'The families are twenty thousand, people about two hundred thousand, nourisht by the Ayre, and a few roots and rice, such dyet as best complies with such torrid regions.' It was here that Sir Robert Sherley, one of the chiefs of the Mission, died, or in the words of Sir Thomas, who records the event, 'he gave this miserable and fickle world an ultimum vale in his great clymacterick.' 'Foureteene days' consuming of a deadly flux,' immediately after brought 'that religious gentleman Sir Dodmore Cotton the Ambassadar, in the vigor of his age, to an immortal home.' 'He was, I assure you, vivum omnis virtutis exemplar,' he adds, 'and I wish I could better expresse my love, than by decking his herse with this impolisht Epicædium:

> Lo! noble Cotton far from home hath found
> A resting place in the Assyrian ground.
> His countries' love, his duty to his King
> So far, a willing heart from home did bring.
> Harden they tendernesse, no danger feare:
> The way to heaven alike is everywhere.

Taken by the Afghans in 1722 and by the Turks three years later, Kazvin has suffered all the fortunes of war of an Eastern city. Earthquakes also have not spared it, leaving few landmarks of the olden

time to adorn the modern city. The finest thing in Kazvin is the approach through a magnificent avenue of trees to the governor's palace. Built originally by Shah Tahmasp, when he placed his capital here, the ancient royal palace was restored and enlarged by Shah Abbas. From long neglect, however, it has now fallen into ruins, only the great gateway known as the Ali Kapi still remaining. The two chief mosques of Kazvin have greater historical interest than outward beauty, the Jama Musjid having been originally built by Harun-ul-Rashid, who favoured the city in the eighth century, and the Musjid-i-Shah, originally erected by Shah Tahmasp and restored by Fath Ali Shah. It is with infinite surprise that one comes upon an hotel, run more or less on European lines, in Kazvin. The mehmankhaneh at Kum had roused the traveller's admiration after long days on the road without such luxuries, but the hotel at Kazvin far excels it. It is a fine two-storied building, with large courtyard and garden and many outbuildings. Kazvin is at the meeting of many roads direct to Resht, Tabriz, Teheran, and Kum, and the number of horses in the rest-house stables is the largest met with along the route. Inside the hotel there is ample accommodation, while the table in the spacious dining-hall groans beneath many things one has long been a stranger to *en route*, such as bottled beer and burgundy. It reminds one in its general arrangement of an Indian railway refreshment room which does not sound a particularly desirable spot, but which one must do without for a thousand miles along the road in Persia to appreciate at its true worth.

There is nothing, however, to tempt one to linger in Kazvin. The feeling that the best has been done and seen, and impatience to be once more in Europe, grows with every mile of road from Teheran. There is one last ascent to be made over the Elburz range, the road running to a height of seven thousand feet and reviving for a brief space memories of the kotals which has so long since been left behind. Through the Kharzan Pass the scenery is magnificent, rugged and desolate, while lower down in the valleys rushing torrents foam and froth through the gorges, the road a narrow ledge of rock with the towering cliffs above and a yawning precipice below. Then at last the descent to the level of the fever-haunted swamp whereon lies Resht, the northern port of Persia and the goal which one has so long pursued.

About Resht there is little, if anything, to be desired. There is nothing to see and, what was far more important for the moment, but little to eat. It was only after driving all over the town that the 'hotel' was at last discovered. There one's unannounced arrival seemed to be taken almost as an affront, and one's modest request for a room and a bath and breakfast as a most preposterous demand. The two former seemed to be non-existent, and one finally changed in a sort of lumber room which had evidently not been opened to the light of the sun for many days. One could only hope for the credit of Resht that this was not its first-class hotel and that the stupidity of the coachman had been at fault. Resht was formerly a town of considerable importance as the centre of the silk trade, and even at the present time its large export of rice and cotton

from the neighbouring provinces gives it the first place along the Persian shores of the Caspian.

The Caspian, however, is not yet reached. So little enterprise have the Persians shown that they have made no attempt to improve this one of the only two natural outlets they possess. The obstacles to traffic here are enormous, but by no means insurmountable to modern enterprise. From Resht a road runs to Peribazaar, a distance of six miles, for which it is necessary to hire another carriage. There one has again to unload one's belongings and store them away in a small native country boat, which, rowed by Persian boatmen, transport one a journey of five hours by river and lagoon to Enzeli, the final port of embarkation. Even here, however, the journey is not quite complete. After much trouble in getting one's passport viséd, and in purchasing a ticket for Baku, one has again to embark in a small surf-boat to reach the Russian steamer, that can approach no nearer than two miles from the shore, so shallow is the anchorage. At last, however, one is actually on board and soon *en route* to Baku.

It is with infinite regret that one realises that the end of the long land journey has come at last. As the low flat shores recede from sight and the land of the Lion and the Sun fades slowly out beyond the sparkling waters of the Caspian, one sees again as in a flash the long straight road by which one came from gulf to sea. It is only then, with the journey done, as one looks back along the vista of the days and gathers up one's recollections and experiences, that the whole comes slowly into focus and forms

THE SHAH'S SUMMER HOUSE AT RESHT.

THE END OF THE JOURNEY.

a permanent impression in the mind. There is so much that one has seen, and the land that one is leaving is a land of such sharp contrasts, that it is only as the distance grows that things assume their proper shape and fall slowly into place. In sharp contrast rise up the greatness of the past and the weakness of the present. Ahead lies the uncertain future. No country in the world can boast a prouder or more ancient history than this land of the Kings of Kings. All that one had read of their splendour and magnificence had always sounded like some Eastern fable, unreal and mythical, but on the platform at Persepolis, at Shapur, and by the tomb of Cyrus on the Murghab plain one had seen with one's own eyes something of that same splendour and magnificence, which the many passing centuries that have intervened have failed to dim. Here there is the sense of breadth and space in the works of Nature and of man alike. It would almost seem as if Nature herself, massive and colossal, delighting in grand and imposing outlines, had spurred men on to emulate her works. Cyrus the Achæmenian, and Darius the son of Hystaspes, Shapur the Sassanian, proud conqueror of the Roman emperor Valerian, Jenghiz Khan, Tamerlane and Nadir Shah, empire builders all, Shah Abbas the Sefavi, and Fath Ali Shah, the Kajar monarch, all pass in the prime of life and splendour in one long pageant across the page of Persian history; and at the end of all the brilliant line there stands the feeble figure of the present Shah-in-Shah, the unhappy successor of the Kings of Kings.

It is a terrible descent from the past to the

present. Dishonesty and corruption have bitten deep into official life and sapped its strength. It is a sweeping statement, but those who know Persia and the Persians will not deny it, that every man among them has his price. Each is fighting for his own hand. Let no one be misled into sympathy for the so-called constitutional party of reform. Its brief spell of power has proved it utterly incapable, utterly unbalanced, and as venal and corrupt as the party whose fall it plans, and whose places and emoluments it covets. Self-elected, ambitious, with no previous experience in the art of governing, its members have shown all the haste and greed of *parvenus*. Nothing could well be more in the style of comic opera than suddenly to spring a constitution and a representative assembly on a people who for endless centuries have done nothing but obey.

In what direction hope for the future lies it is difficult to see. A paternal despotism is undoubtedly all that Persia is fit for to-day. Yet the storm of opposition once aroused, it is not easy to imagine it altogether silenced. If the Shah could but prove himself the man of the moment, enforcing his rule and at the same time leading his people along well-defined lines towards a final participation in affairs of State, the best solution might be reached. But time passes and the strong man for whom the situation clamours has not yet appeared. So far, however, in spite of all that has happened, Persia has maintained her integrity, and in that lies hope. Though the Russian and the English Ministers may formally protest against the Shah's misdeeds, when they have done that they have done their worst, and

the King of Kings can still smile them out of his audience chamber with fine words and no intentions. If Persia can but fight out her battles within herself, and finally win through, the day may yet come when she will find herself again, and write on the page of history in the future as gloriously as she has done in the past. Within herself she possesses vast possibilities, commercial and industrial, as yet almost entirely unexploited. Without a single line of rail, save the six-mile line from Teheran to the mosque of Shah Abdul Azim, the whole of her vast territory still remains a sealed book, while her ports upon the Caspian and the Gulf still await the development they would so well repay.

The last faint outline of the land of the Lion and the Sun fades into the starlit night, as the ship bears on her way across the Caspian. And as it passes out of sight one breathes a hope that the land, in which one has spent such fascinating days, may yet arise from the troubles that beset her and again attain to something of the greatness and the splendour that once were hers.

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